

Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Date: July 25, 2025

Time: 9:00 A.M.

Place: Francis Tuttle Technology Center – Northwest Hall

Call to Order/Welcome

Chair Gray welcomes everyone to the meeting. He reminds everyone about the parking lot.

Approval of April 25, 2025, Minutes

Chair Gray presented the minutes from the April 25, 2025, meeting. A motion to approve was made by Jeanie Webb and seconded by Rep. Brian Hill. The motion passed unanimously.

Guest Speaker: Senator Adam Pugh

Chair Gray introduced Senator Adam Pugh. Senator Pugh shared his background and the path that led him to his current focus on aerospace and education. He emphasized the importance of viewing workforce development as a collective effort and being intentional about telling Oklahoma's workforce story. He noted that many individuals possess valuable skill sets but need clearer guidance on how to enter the workforce and where they fit best.

Senator Pugh explained that he was elected prior to the teacher walkout. After his first term, when the previous Education Committee Chair termed out, he requested to chair that committee. He recognized the need to view education and workforce development as interconnected systems, not as separate entities. He encouraged flexibility and innovation in how we approach both areas.

Regarding the impact of artificial intelligence (AI), Senator Pugh stated that he does not believe AI will replace the workforce. Instead, it will enhance productivity and expand opportunities, allowing workers to become "Swiss Army knives" — adaptable and versatile. He framed this as an opportunity for upskilling, not reskilling.

Senator Pugh also discussed his role as chair of the ARPA Committee, which directed funding to workforce initiatives. Initially, the committee focused on addressing the nursing shortage, emphasizing that workforce pipelines begin well before college. For example, students interested in nursing or engineering need exposure and foundational coursework in high school—yet many high schools do not offer courses such as Calculus II, which are critical for engineering pathways. He stressed the importance of early exposure, internships, and apprenticeships as tools to build interest and strengthen workforce readiness across all communities.

Senator Pugh concluded by challenging a traditional mindset: Does hard work conquer all? It's not popular to say, but that's not how it works anymore. Hard work combined with a skill set is what truly matters.

Oklahoma Workforce Commission Updates: Kyla Guyette

Kyla Guyette provided an update on the Oklahoma Workforce Commission, which was created by Senate Bill 621. The Commission consists of nine members and began work on January 1 of this year. Its mission is to navigate and strengthen Oklahoma's workforce ecosystem.

A key responsibility of the Commission is to determine how much funding the state is investing in workforce development, as there is currently no single entity that can provide a comprehensive overview.

The Workforce Commission is proposing to move the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development under its structure. This alignment would bring together related planning efforts and ensure coordination across entities working toward similar goals.

Kyla noted several upcoming challenges, including significant funding cuts to the workforce system. Continuing services as usual will not be possible, making it necessary to reduce duplication and find innovative, creative solutions. She also highlighted that one in four Oklahomans are on Medicaid, which will soon have work requirements. Approximately 150,000 individuals who were previously exempt will now need to participate, increasing demand for workforce services. Similar impacts are expected from individuals receiving SNAP and disability services. The system must be prepared to handle this increased demand effectively.

Looking ahead, Kyla emphasized the importance of developing a strong public-private partnership and creating an interconnected workforce ecosystem with clear lanes of responsibility and accountability. The Commission is also focused on establishing a recognizable statewide brand. Partners are meeting weekly to plan next steps, including the creation of a single front door for workforce services — a common intake system designed to simplify access. This will lead to integrated case management systems.

To further improve access, the Commission is exploring the use of kiosk systems to reduce physical footprint. Example locations include hospitals or supermarkets; these kiosks would connect users directly to a live representative and could be placed in locations where people naturally go. The kiosks may also be able to issue incentive cards, providing a new, technology-driven approach to delivering services more efficiently and conveniently.

Other key initiatives include improving data use and education alignment. The Commission aims to make data-driven decisions through the creation of a comprehensive data dashboard that reflects real-time workforce activity. They are also currently funding five ARPA projects to address workforce needs across the state.

On the education front, the focus is on competency-based learning to help individuals move from training to employment more efficiently. A pilot program is in development. In K-12, the Commission is working toward a "STEM-ready" high school diploma, identifying students as early as 8th grade and connecting them to higher-level math and science courses in partnership with higher education institutions. Kyla also shared the concept of Career Launch, a revolving fund initiative designed to support skill identification beginning in elementary school. The program envisions robust career exploration opportunities in middle school and paid work experiences in high school. It represents a universal expansion of the Oklahoma Career Guide.

Approval of Local and Regional Workforce Board Strategic Plans

Chair Gray presented the Local and Regional Workforce Board Strategic Plans. A motion to approve was made by Dennis Luckinbill and seconded by Jeanie Webb. The motion passed unanimously.

Committees

Healthcare: Chair Lara Morris shared details about the upcoming virtual career day for high school students, along with plans for in-person career fairs in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Event dates and times will be announced and distributed soon.

Career Pathways: Chair Shauna Nord provided an update on the Career Pathways Committee. The committee plans to reconvene to discuss opportunities for supporting the Workforce Commission's initiatives and determine next steps for collaboration.

Partnership Updates – OESC (title 1 & 4), CareerTech (title 2), DRS (title 3)

OESC: Trae Rahill provided an update on the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission. The agency has been focused on technology modernization efforts to improve efficiency and service delivery. A major milestone was the launch of the new Claimant Portal, which represents the largest technology release in the agency's history. The new system has significantly reduced the time required for both customers and employees to complete processes, improving overall user experience and operational effectiveness.

Trae also highlighted legislative progress. Representative Mark Tedford championed a bill that reduced employer tax rates and reformed the state's rate table. This change provides meaningful relief to small businesses, as approximately 80% of Oklahoma's employers have nine employees or fewer.

Additionally, OESC is engaged in WIOA State Plan modification meetings, working with partners across the workforce system to align strategies and create a unified approach. Trae noted that this process has been both exciting and challenging as the agency collaborates to strengthen statewide workforce coordination.

Career Tech: CareerTech did not have an update.

DRS: Melinda provided an update on DRS. The agency continues to expand workforce participation through its vocational rehabilitation programs, which connect individuals with disabilities to meaningful employment opportunities. These programs often include education and support services to help individuals transition from tax takers to taxpayers while increasing overall labor force participation.

Within DRS, the Business Services and Employer Engagement division has placed a strong emphasis on rural outreach. The team hosts employer partner meetings and provides trainings on accessibility, inclusion, and related topics under the "Access for All" initiative.

Melinda also shared that DRS is launching a statewide training initiative to further strengthen employer engagement and inclusive hiring practices. In addition, a Career Expo will be held in Tulsa on September 9, with the goal of connecting job seekers with inclusive employers across the state.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Governor's Council will be on October 24, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at Francis Tuttle Rockwell Campus – Northwest Hall.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 a.m.

Attendance

Present: Babu Peringol, Rep. Brian Hill, Charles Gray, Cliff Stewart, Daniel Russell, David Reid, Dennis Luckinbill, Heather Turner, Jacob Matherly, Jacob McHughes, Jamie Payne, Jeanie Webb, Rep. Mark Tedford, Melinda Fruendt, Nico Ciccone, Robin Arter, Scott Fry, Stan Booker, Stephanie Vickers Regan, Trae Rahill, Cassidy Minx, Clint Castleberry, Marissa Lightsey, Stephanie Rose

Absent: Bill Coleman, Chase Beasley, Chris Fusselman, Jack O. Sherry, John Budd, Kristen Thompson, Stan McCabe, Terry Adams

*Respectfully submitted,
Maci Majors*