

FAST FACTS

- The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WDB), in partnership with national, state and local governments, is the local policy board responsible for the planning, oversight and coordination of workforce development initiatives in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties. Of the 14 metropolitan statistical areas (MSA), the Hickory MSA is currently the seventh largest Metro area in North Carolina. As of Census 2010, Alexander-Burke-Caldwell-Catawba County population is 365,497.
- Established by federal law, the Board has been in place since 1982. In 1995, Governor Hunt by Executive Order expanded the Board’s responsibilities, and in 1999 the N.C. General Assembly authorized duties of the State’s 24 Workforce Development Boards.
- The Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board (WDB) is comprised of volunteers from private and public sector, appointed by Local Elected officials. The majority represents the Private Sector. Marty Waters, President of Marlin Company, Inc., currently serves as Chair.

- CURRENT INITIATIVES:

Career Centers-The WDB has oversight responsibility of the areas Career Centers, currently under integration to be certified as NCWORKS Career Centers (formerly known as the Employment Security Commission offices). Malcolm Baldrige Quality Criteria is utilized as the basis for chartering and re-chartering one-stop Career Centers to ensure high quality one-stop career centers. NCWorks Career Centers offer universal and convenient access to an array of services for businesses, job seekers and persons interested in training opportunities. There are currently two certified NCWorks Career Centers (Caldwell & Catawba) in the Western Piedmont area, and two uncertified Career Centers (Burke & Alexander).

Rapid Response Assistance for closings/reductions in force – WDB staff and Career Center partners respond to dislocations resulting from business closings and reductions in force. As part of a state and/or local team, meetings are held with employers to advise as to various services available and to assist in the transition of individual employees affected.

Industry Growth Analysis – An analysis has been conducted to identify high-wages, fast growth industries/businesses that could locate in the region, a basic step toward long-term regional economic growth. The *most favored* could become the focus of economic development efforts, now the case with two area economic development partners. Data from the report is available to assist are Elected Officials in making the difficult decisions associated with providing economic development initiatives. Additionally, the study matches high paying, high growth jobs with educational programs which focus on skills required for employment in these sectors. The WDB has used this information in determining preferred areas of training assistance. The most recent IGA can be found at www.westernpiedmontworks.org

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Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) – The WDB is the primary sponsor of a quarterly publication to report economic trends in the Greater Hickory MSA. The publication is distributed to local governments, school systems, economic developers, Chambers of Commerce, businesses, etc. Some of the growth indicators which have been and analyzed and/or to be analyzed in future issues include bank deposits, new residential and nonresidential construction patterns, employment trends, poverty and income levels, population, real estate information and hotel/motel activity. A primary purpose of the publication is to make each issue useful and as up-to-date as possible, particularly in light of the current economic crisis facing the region. To subscribe call (828) 322-9191 or email: taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org

Career Readiness Certification (CRC) – As a tool to meet the needs of a transitioning economy, the WDB has recognized the CRC as an economic and workforce development tool which can enable existing and potential businesses to access the right employees, decrease turnover, and improve hiring decisions. The CRC is an initiative that provides workers a portable credential which certifies their possession of workplace skills assessment tool developed by ACT, Inc., as the basis for skills determination. The WDB has partnered with the areas three community colleges, area Economic Developers and area Chamber of Commerce in this initiative. The WDB has recently made additional dollars available to the three area community colleges to enable more citizens the opportunity to receive the CRC.

Incumbent Worker – The Incumbent Worker program was designed by the State to assist businesses with training their employees in new or enhanced occupational and educational skills. The Western Piedmont WDB is among the top Boards in NC with Incumbent Worker Grants awarded. Since the program inception in 2003, more than \$1,221,800 has been awarded to 36 Greater Hickory Metro companies, with approximately 4160 workers being trained. The training has afforded businesses the opportunity to remain competitive and in some instances, to avoid major lay-offs and/or closures.

On-the-Job Training (OJT) – The Western Piedmont WDB provides incentives to area businesses to assist in defraying the extraordinary cost of training new employees. Employers can receive a percentage of wage reimbursement in return for training Workforce Investment Act (WIA) eligible individuals. Examples of OJT training contracts include furniture upholstery, heating and air-conditioning, medical office assistant, product inspection, welding, machine operator, and customer service.

Educational Scholarships – The WDB has approved at list of Occupations in Demand where Workforce Investment Act Funding can be used for training. The occupations listed are considered “Demand” occupations in the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Area. This list is based on information from the identified sector strategies of the AdvantageWest Regional Economic Development, Group, Carolina’s Partnership Economic Development Group, the WDB’s Industry Growth Analysis and the State sponsored “State of the Workforce Report”> With Workforce Investment Act funds, the WDB has provided training scholarships in diverse occupations such as: Nursing, HVAC, Early Childhood Education, Teacher Assistant, Upholsterer, Criminal Justice, Radiology, Accounting, Speech/Language Pathology, Surgical Technician, Carpentry, Dental Hygienist, Truck Driver, Funeral Services, etc.

Youth Council – A mandated committee of the Workforce Development Board is the Youth Council. A recent focus of the Youth Council has been to enhance the skills of youth service providers. Additionally, the Youth Council has hosted Youth Forums for over 250 “at-risk” youth in our four county area. The focus of the forums has been career readiness and educational attainment.

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Regional WDB Collaboration – Three Western NC Workforce Development Boards, Western Piedmont, Region C, and High Country have formed the Future Workforce Alliance (FWA), a collaboration of leaders in Western North Carolina, representing the interests of businesses, workers and public investors within a 15 county region. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed by the FWA Partners. The purpose of the agreement is to improve the capacity of the partner organization to meet the workforce development needs of a multi-county region as well as to share resources and responsibilities in accomplishing that goal. Counties represented in this collaboration include: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey.

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