

Knox Business Advisory Council Meeting Minutes August 28th, 2025

Chair Julia Suggs called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Attendance:

- East Knox Local Schools - Superintendent, Rich Baird
- Danville Local Schools - Superintendent, Jason Snively
- Mount Vernon City Schools - Kathy Kasler
- Centerburg Local Schools - Absent
- Fredericktown Local Schools - Superintendent, Gary Chapman
- Knox County Career Center - Jeff Lavin
- Area Development Foundation (Chair) - Vice President, Julia Suggs
- Knox County OhioMeansJobs Office - Administrative Director, Brandy Booth
- Regional OhioMeansJobs Office - Kelly Carey
- Manufacturing Industry Representative - Mauser Packaging, Holley Wiford
- Construction Industry Representative - Kokosing Inc., Andy Fox
- Healthcare Industry Representative: Knox Community Hospital, Hanna Ford
- ESC Career Navigator - Sean McCutcheon
- Knox County Career Center (KCCC) Career Connections Advisor - Shelly Laslo

Opening Remarks

Ms. Suggs welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. She reviewed the agenda and invited each attendee to introduce themselves.

BAC Business & Operations

Review/Approval of April Meeting Minutes

- Mr. Fox motioned to approve the April meeting minutes. Mr. Chapman seconded the motion, and all in attendance approved.

Bylaw Amendment – Adding KCCC and ESC Representatives

- The original bylaws did not include representatives from the Knox County Career Center (KCCC) or the Knox Educational Service Center (ESC), both of which are essential partners for the BAC.
- Ms. Wiford motioned to approve the amendment to the bylaws. Mr. Snively seconded, and all in attendance approved.

2025 State BAC Town Hall Report - BAC Annual Report

- Ms. Suggs shared that the Ohio BAC Town Hall event in January showed that the Knox BAC is meeting all the standards for a successful BAC.
- She is working on the 2025 BAC report with data assistance from Sean McCutcheon and Christine Keaton.

CTE Waivers for 7th and 8th Graders

- Ms. Laslo announced that CTE waivers for 7th and 8th graders have been eliminated. School districts will be required to provide career technical education for 7th and 8th graders by the 2026 school year.
- She has been working with school districts to provide guidance on how she can support this initiative.

WorkDev Programming:

- Healthcare Expos: One will be held in Centerburg, KCCC, MVHS, and Fredericktown this school year.
 - These events bring in healthcare professionals from Knox Community Hospital, Knox Public Health, Knox Technical Center, and the Ohio Eastern Star Home to talk to students about the diversity of healthcare career pathways.
 - At past events, 60% of students stated that before the event, they were not considering a career in healthcare, but they learned about a job at the event that they are considering pursuing.
- Knox ASPECT is a manufacturing readiness program that WorkDev and the Columbus State Manufacturing Extension Partnership lead in April every year. Every school district in the county has had students participate in this, and it will be open again for all high school seniors in the spring.
 - Ms. Suggs shared a video made of the 2025 ASPECT program.
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqksE7FanCk>

Educator Workforce Experience Proposal

- Ms. Suggs presented the Educator Workforce Experience Proposal, which is part of the WorkDev 2025–2026 Strategic Action Plan. The purpose of these workforce experiences is to help teachers become advocates for in-demand jobs while empowering them to encourage professional skills in their classrooms and spheres of influence.
- Goals & Outcomes
 - Connects to the work the career advisors are currently doing in the county.
 - Informs teachers on how to implement easy strategies to be able to sign off on more skills related to the OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal.
 - Designed by a collaborative team. Created by educators and business advocates for a cohesive approach.
 - Provides practical experiences highlighting specific industries such as manufacturing and healthcare, while emphasizing the diversity of career pathways.
 - Reinforces the importance of recognizing and cultivating student aptitudes, whether or not college is part of their path.
 - Could include CTE opportunities through the ESC if needed.
- Scheduling Options:
 - She shared they could do a 1-hour slot, a half day that includes a tour, a full day with many tours, or a multi-day.
 - They have a full day scheduled at Fredericktown High School with the agenda attached to the packet.
 - They have a 1-hour slot schedule with Mount Vernon High School (MVHS) as well to discuss soft skills and in-demand jobs.

- Ms. Suggs emphasized flexibility, noting that experiences can be scaled to fit any PD day length and aligned with each school's current career initiatives.
- She acknowledged the scheduling challenges and stressed that these experiences could be offered this year or in future years when opportunities arise.
- Future Opportunities
 - Teacher Bootcamp: Planned as a summer, more intensive program. Details are still in development and will be shared in a later meeting.
- Call for Engagement
 - Ms. Suggs highlighted that these initiatives are most effective when supported from the top down.
 - She asked that any school administration interested in hosting an educator workforce experience for their teacher reach out to her to get something planned. Depending on the school district, the related career advisor will be involved in the presentation/event.

Industry Updates and Discussion

- **OhioMeansJobs – Knox County**
 - Ms. Booth shared that Career Quest is scheduled for October 6th. Every 8th and 10th grader in the county will attend, with 47 companies registered to have tables at the event.
 - She is also planning an educator job fair for Knox County. This event could be held in partnership with MVNU's educator fair for school districts to hire for open positions.
 - Mr. Baird noted that planning these events is difficult because most openings are filled by March, and the positions they really need to fill arise unexpectedly, typically during the summer. Other school districts echoed this concern, suggesting that late May or mid-June would be better timing.
 - Ms. Booth mentioned that hosting two job fairs could be a solution.
 - Ms. Baird stressed the difficulty in attracting candidates due to the shortage of teacher graduates. She expressed a need to reach out to students who could be convinced to pursue teaching. Ms. Suggs offered to discuss potential partnerships with MVNU to address this.
 - Mr. Snively shared that many of their teachers come through alternative licensure programs.
 - Mr. Baird highlighted that promoting the benefits and retirement options in teaching could help attract more candidates.
 - Ms. Booth has committed to reaching these possibilities further and following up with the council at a later meeting.
- **Healthcare – Knox Community Hospital (KCH)**
 - Ms. Ford shared that KCH is exploring new partnerships to support operations as healthcare costs continue to rise at the community level.

- Initially concerned that the news would cause employees to leave, they have found that employees are actually excited about the new opportunities and want to see them through.
- KCH is focusing heavily on recruiting clinical students, especially for high-need positions like pharmacy techs, medical assistants, and radiology techs.
- Currently, there are 108 job openings at KCH, but they aim to stay below 90 openings to maintain staffing capacity.
- Their partnerships with local schools have been valuable for recruitment efforts.
- Ms. Ford praised healthcare expos as excellent long-term recruitment tools, with positive responses and increased interest in healthcare careers within Knox County.
- She noted a significant shortage of workers in the healthcare sector, which is still being impacted by COVID-19. She couldn't predict when the full effects of COVID will be over.
- Ms. Ford pointed out that soft skills, particularly in customer service, are lacking among many applicants, which is a growing concern in healthcare.
- **Manufacturing – Mauser Packaging**
 - Ms. Wiford shared that the lasting effects of COVID are still evident in the manufacturing industry, particularly regarding new hires' understanding of job expectations and requirements. These issues are especially prevalent among younger workers.
 - Mauser has seen challenges with new hires not fully understanding work expectations.
 - To improve retention, companies are still raising wages.
 - Mauser still has open positions, but most other companies are nearly fully staffed.
 - Local companies have been receiving applicants from an International Paper plant that recently closed in Marion.
 - Mauser is transitioning to weekly paychecks instead of bi-weekly pay.
 - Financial literacy remains a significant issue, affecting workers' perceptions of their wages.
- **Construction – Kokosing Inc.**
 - Mr. Fox discussed the strong demand for skilled trades, emphasizing that workers with specialized skills are highly sought after in a competitive market.
 - Kokosing has no trouble attracting local workers, but struggles to fill traveling positions in other states. While local workers start at \$25/hr in the apprenticeship program, they can earn \$35–40/hr within 4 years. However, travel expenses remain a challenge, especially for workers who lack financial literacy regarding how to manage their wages.
 - He noted that without union halls, construction companies would be struggling.
 - Kokosing has recently hired 5 students who are now working at the Sioux Saint Marie Locks in Michigan. These students are in the carpenters' union and are earning \$47/hr, working 60 hours per week, and the company is covering their accommodation and meals.

- Kokosing hired 60 engineers this year who are working on projects in surrounding states.
- The company has also doubled PTO for salaried positions to improve employee attraction and retention.
- The entire construction industry is experiencing growth.

Attendance Discussion

At the previous meeting, the BAC initiated a discussion on the importance of attendance at school and work, and how school districts can encourage better attendance as a lifelong skill.

The employers shared their current attendance policies:

- Kokosing: Employees are allowed 2 excused absences and 1 unexcused absence. After that, they are terminated.
- KCH: Their attendance policy includes a verbal warning, a first written warning, a second warning, and then termination for unexcused absences. They are working to take a more personalized approach by having department heads discuss attendance issues with employees.
- Mauser: Offers an attendance bonus of \$300 per month for perfect attendance. They have found that employees have improved attendance once they receive the bonus for the first time, and after missing a day, realize that their poor attendance costs them \$300. It helps change their perspective on the bonus.

The school districts shared their current challenges with attendance. Not all comments are from one specific council member, but were shared by multiple.

- It was shared that “School choice” is a political term that has complicated the issue of absenteeism. Schools have the authority to take parents to court for truancy, but there are no criminal charges available. Some parents are bypassing this by claiming their child is homeschooled, even though the child is not receiving an education. Students sometimes move between districts to avoid truancy penalties.
 - Many students miss school due to family circumstances, such as low-income families with less value placed on education. Some students also miss school to go on multiple vacations with their separated parents. There is a lack of accountability for these absences.
 - Frustration was expressed that schools are held accountable for student attendance, but have no authority to enforce it.
 - They noted that attendance is an issue both for students and staff as they try to set positive expectations for everyone involved with their districts.
- Ms. Booth: Shared an experience with an online school where a student's lack of attendance was ignored, and they still “passed”.
- Mr. Lavin: Shared that KCCC also faces this issue. In the past, students who missed more than 10 days were expelled. Although they cannot consider attendance during the application review process, they are offering programs with incentives for good attendance.

- Ms. Suggs shared that she would look into resources related to this conversation and that the next meeting will have a part two regarding attendance to discuss how employers and school districts can create support through connected efforts.

Closing Remarks

- Mr. McCutcheon offered a positive note on career outlook. He mentioned that, in the past, many students were uncertain about their futures, but after speaking to every junior at Danville this week, each student had a developed plan for their education and career. He offered to bring notes to the next meeting summarizing the career goals for all high school students in the county.

The meeting adjourned at 9:39 am.

Respectfully submitted by Julia Suggs, Area Development Foundation, Vice President