



Supporting the Development and Retention of a World Class Workforce

Jeffrey S. Swartz, Executive Director

Carl A. Donato Jr., Chair

LITERACY COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2023  
ZOOM MEETING

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE INFORMATION AND ATTENDANCE							
NAME	ORGANIZATION	TRUSTEE MEMBER					
			2-May-23	6-Jun-23	11-Jul-23	1-Aug-23	5-Sep-23
Kalitan, Marlyn Chair	Kalitan Consulting	X	X	X	X	X	X
Abrams, Larry	BookSmiles		X		X	X	X
Beach, Patti	Goodwill		X		X	X	
Chisolm, Victoria	Literacy Volunteers of America						
Cirii, Frank	Camden County One Stop	X			X	X	
D'amato, Greg	Pine Hill School District					X	
Dann, Carol	HopeWorks Camden						
Daunoras, Heidi	Pine Hill School District		X		X	X	X
Druce, Jennifer	Camden County Library						
Egrie, Gabrielle	Watermark Communities		X				X
Fithian, Danielle	Goodwill						
Fugee, Antoinette	Cooper Healthcare						
Hill, Lauren Dr.	Camden County College		X	X	X		
Johnstone, Brent	Fathers365						X
Knopf, Dick	Marketing Professional Services		X	X	X		X
Mauro, Jennifer	Goodwill				X		
McKelvey, Christopher	Councilman, Clementon Borough		X	X			X
Norman, Tahja	Orchards Family Success Center						
Page-Soncrant, Jeanne	Dept. of Labor						
Petty-Ford, Shawnee	HopeWorks Camden				X		
Rutzler, Eugene	Literacy Needs Assessment Intern						
Sinclair, Nidia	Camden County One-Stop						
Soira, Lizette	Orchards Family Success Center						
Staples, Akeiff	Fathers365						X
Strobl, Holly	Councilwoman, Clementon Borough						
Young, Jennifer	Verizon					X	X
Willmann, Michael	WMSH		X		X	X	X
Levitt, Alex	WDB		X	X	X	X	X
Swartz, Jeffrey S.	WDB		X	X	X	X	X
Vaughn, Debra	WDB		X	X	X	X	X

**WELCOME**

Marlyn greeted the attendees and opened the meeting at 8:35 am. She asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the August 1, 2023 meeting. Motion was made Dick Knopf, seconded by Jeff Swartz. By majority vote to the affirmative, the motion was carried, and the minutes for August 1, 2023 were approved. Attendees were asked to introduce themselves and Marlyn reminded the committee that a Vice-Chair is needed.

**COMMITTEE DISCUSSION**

**2023 – 2024 Activities**

- Jeff commented that the WDB attended National Night Out events in Cherry Hill, Pine Hill and Clementon in August. Promotional materials for the Camden County Literacy Guide, One-Stop Virtual Services and Atlantic City Electric’s SPARK internship program were distributed during the community events.
- Marlyn commented that the committee should consider ideas for the school year. She asked if there is another library that the committee should concentrate on since the Clementon library has been reopened. Alex responded that the Gibbsboro Library was currently closed.

- Alex commented that a young man at one of the Night Out events stated that he did not read books, to which Heidi responded that reading is generationally not prioritized. She added that young people and parents not reading books is not a trend, and that the county's book deserts are in areas that do not have access to libraries, or transportation to libraries.

### **Fathers Read 365**

Brent Johnstone, Akieff Staples

- Larry introduced Brent Johnstone and Akieff Staples of FathersRead365.
- Brent and Akieff are former social workers who left their careers to start their Philadelphia-based organization which provides books in disadvantaged areas of the city considered to be "book deserts." Book deserts are areas where resources and access to books and safe libraries are limited or non-existent. They started without funding, donating books from their own children's libraries at events and out of their own cars in Philadelphia communities. As part of their outreach events, Brent and Akieff provide 35 to 40-minute presentations and read books to children in an unconventional way (loud, active and fun). After the reading, the children are offered as many books as they like to take home.
- After running their organization for two and a half years with no funding, they have given away 100,000 books in 3 years. Vanguard Group recently funded a book bus for FathersRead365. This year, through their relationship with BookSmiles, they have given away 61,000 books.
- Brent stated that research showed that 61% of inner-city children had no "home libraries." He and Akieff developed a model called "books in hands" and collected books from facilities in Philadelphia and delivered them to book desert communities, distributing them wherever they could gain access to kids (schools, daycares, camps, etc.). Brent commented they do not limit the number of books someone can take and in one case, he had a young lady who took 30 books home.
- FathersRead365 targets the poorest zip codes and has signed up 100 daycares in the Philadelphia region between New Jersey and Philadelphia. The organization piloted a "READY First Network" (Reading Empowers All Developing Youth), to assist children to be at reading level as they begin kindergarten. They have expanded their outreach into Camden County and have signed up 3 daycare centers in Camden and 3 daycare centers in Pennsauken. They will host a Father's Night in Camden City on the 28th of September, on what they called a "Bring Your Dads To School Day" promotion.
- A HarperCollins study showed that only 29% of men (fathers) across all communities are reading with their children. Another study showed that when fathers read to their children, there are better outcomes than when mothers do.
- Akieff is diabetic and Brent is dyslexic. They use their personal experiences as opportunities to spread awareness by reading their own stories, "Mr. Healthy Snacks" and "I'm Beautiful and I'm Proud" (about self-esteem). At the end of their presentations, Akieff and Brent use picture books, not only for the children, but also as a training opportunity for the parents who may not be able to read.
- Brent inquired about resources, potential funding sources and introductions in communities for them to provide their services. Jeff responded the CCWDB would like to partner with FathersRead365 but could not spend Federal grant dollars. He stated that it was possible to apply for private foundation grants for funding from businesses that support literacy activities (such as Target and Dollar General).

### **BookSmiles**

Larry Abrams

- Larry stressed the urgency of early childhood literacy, beginning with baby board books. BookSmiles distributes 50,000 books per month, and he welcomes non-profits and organizations to take advantage of his resources and pick up books to distribute to advance childhood literacy in areas that are considered "book deserts". He stated that teachers do visit the warehouse in their free time for "Teacher Take" on Wednesdays and Sundays and take as many books as they like. BookSmiles has tens of thousands of quality books available at its Pennsauken book bank, located at 7300 North Crescent Blvd. #10, Pennsauken, NJ 08110, which is open Monday to Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

- Alex proposed introducing parents, teachers and daycare owners to BookSmiles with a book give-away event at the BookSmiles warehouse. Jeff suggested an event on 10/28 (Halloween). Larry stated he is available in the morning of 10/21 or the afternoon of 10/28. After further discussion, Larry commented that he would provide pizza lunch for a noon event on Wednesday, October 25<sup>th</sup> at the BookSmiles warehouse. He, Brent and Akieff will discuss a theme for the event. The target audience will be representative from the school districts and non-profit organizations.

#### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

Jeff Swartz, Executive Director

- The Quarterly Board Meeting will be held on September 20, 2023 at 9:00 am via Zoom. A few business items are on the agenda, so a quorum is need. The December Quarterly Board Meeting will be in person at Camden County College.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Marlyn made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Chris McKelvey. By majority vote to the affirmative, the motion was carried, and the meeting adjourned at 9:30 am.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

The next Literacy Committee meeting will be held Tuesday, October 3, 2023, at 8:30 am via Zoom. Meeting materials and Zoom conferencing information will be distributed prior to the meeting.

Submitted by:

Debra Vaughn,  
Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director