

April 17, 2014

TO: Governor Chris Christie

FROM: Harold J. Wirths, Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development

RE: LWD Initiatives in Support of Career Awareness

In accordance with P.L. 2013, Chapter 256, I am pleased to report on recent career awareness initiatives underway at the New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development (LWD).

Our review of LWD's efforts to "provide middle and high school students with information concerning employment in high-demand industries" found that LWD has significantly increased career guidance resources for students, teachers, school counselors, and parents under this administration. This spring, LWD will introduce additional career awareness materials and tools to help young people throughout New Jersey access the latest information on critical work skills and promising career options.

Recent Career Awareness Efforts

Providing up to date information on high-demand work skills, occupations and career paths to students and job seekers statewide has always been part of LWD's mission. More recently, LWD's Office of Research and Information (ORI) has brought new energy to this goal through the coordinated efforts of its Labor Market & Demographic Research unit (LMDR) and its Center for Occupational Employment Information (COEI).

ORI is New Jersey's premiere source for economic, labor market, and demographic intelligence. It is where LWD staff members routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the state's extensive workforce programs. The information and insights produced within this office are regularly shared not only with government decision makers but also with students, schools, businesses, workers, training providers, the media, and the general public.

ORI works closely in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment & Training Administration and Bureau of Labor Statistics. ORI also oversees the State Data Center, which has access to -- and regularly utilizes -- the extensive resources of the U.S. Census Bureau.

LWD, through the ORI, consistently seeks new ways to display and share these vast data resources in user-friendly formats that can be understood by adults and young people alike. Much of the activity in recent years has focused on highlighting specific economic, workforce, and demographic information that can build career awareness among New Jersey students and guide adults to high-demand jobs and work skills.

Since 2010, LMDR publications such as *Labor Market Views*, *Regional Focus* and special industry analyses have focused on leading New Jersey industry sectors and clusters where promising job opportunities and career paths are most likely to be found. These include the state's formidable business clusters in Life Sciences (biomedicine and the pharmaceutical industry), Transportation/Logistics/Distribution (TLD), Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Retail/Hospitality/Tourism (RHT), Entrepreneurship & Technology, and Finance. LMDR also identifies high-growth occupations anticipated for the future through its long-term employment projections. The next update is scheduled for July 2014.

LMDR's data team also created *What's Next?*, a popular career awareness publication for middle and high school students that helps teachers and school counselors connect classroom lessons to the skill needs of the modern workplace. It identifies specific job opportunities that match up with areas of study, such as Social Studies, Math, Natural Sciences, Performing Arts, and Vocational Training. Information on each job includes the number of annual openings in New Jersey, average salaries, and the education levels required. The latest issue of *What's Next?* will be posted on the LWD website later this spring, where it can be downloaded for free.

Working in collaboration with the LMDR unit, the department's Center for Occupational Employment Information also has been supporting career awareness efforts. Created in 2006 (P.L. 2005, c. 354), COEI carries out a wide range of federally-required, state-level career information activities. These include making career information and planning resources available to teachers, administrators, and counselors; helping state entities create career-related educational resources and training; and improving communication on careers among workforce investment system staff. The law also called on COEI to implement an electronic career information delivery system in support of New Jersey training and job placement programs and to designate labor demand occupations.

COEI manages the New Jersey Training Opportunities website, home of the state's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and the Consumer Report Card. Both products are used by consumers to explore post-secondary educational options as part of their career development activities. The COEI staff conducts an ongoing review of training programs at hundreds of New Jersey post-secondary schools and collects enrollment and exit data on trainees that show consumers, career counselors, and policy makers which programs graduate the most successful job candidates. ETPL and the Consumer Report Card have been a part of COEI's operation since its inception, and they are currently undergoing an overhaul for technical and process enhancements.

COEI also has maintained on-line career awareness information for the state, beginning as the Career Information Delivery System (CIDS) and, in 2008, as the New Jersey Career Assistance Navigator (NJCAN) via a contract with intoCAREERS. The NJCAN product offers national and local data and information on 16 career clusters, 81 career pathways, and 508 occupations for secondary students and adults. In 2013, the New Jersey Department of Education became the fiscal agent on the contract with intoCAREERS to increase hands-on training at secondary schools in New Jersey, while COEI continues to support NJCAN for adult clients.

2014 Career Awareness Efforts

This year, LWD is undertaking major initiatives that will help students, teachers, school counselors, and others access even more relevant information on careers and work skills, much of it specific to New Jersey. The ORI staff members are working together in support of:

Career Awareness Brochures. In May 2014, LWD will release a new series of detailed profiles of employment opportunities in New Jersey's leading industry clusters, including the Life Sciences, Transportation/Logistics/Distribution, Health Care, Finance, Advanced Manufacturing, Entrepreneurships and Technology, and Retail/Hospitality/Tourism. The latest data on each cluster's job skills, industry credentials, annual openings, salary ranges, and links to the related New Jersey Talent Networks have been assembled by the LMDR and COEI teams. The content also reflects direct feedback from employers who were able to share their insights into recent trends in hiring, technology and market demand. LWD plans to distribute 5,000 brochures for each industry cluster profile to schools, career centers, libraries, and individuals statewide.

Online Career Information. COEI staff members are already working to follow up the May distribution of the industry Career Awareness brochures with electronic versions that can be accessed anytime online. Websites for each sector will feature the same content on employment, skills, and credentials as the paper brochures and will become permanent sources of new industry information and insights. Regular updates will continue to add data on emerging employment trends and potential career paths.

Summary

LWD finds that its efforts to provide employment information are ample and abundant. Various data and information are readily available to middle and high school students, as well as to the general public. As a result, New Jersey residents should face no barriers to accessing such information.