

*Written testimony by Workforce Connections, the Workforce Investment Board serving Southern Nevada, for the Committee on Education and the Workforce hearing, "Examining Local Solutions to Strengthen Federal Job Training Programs"*

## Southern Nevada: A flexible, innovative, high performance workforce development system.

Chairman Kline, Ranking Member Miller and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony today, and welcome to Southern Nevada. Certainly you could not have picked a more relevant labor market to visit in your quest for information and ideas regarding the strengthening of the federal workforce system. We are pleased to share with you a few examples of approaches that are working here in the face of the country's most challenging local economy, and a few lessons learned about preparing a globally competitive workforce in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The work being done by Workforce Connections (we are the WIB serving Southern Nevada, including Clark, Esmeralda, Lincoln and Nye counties) and our community partners has evolved rapidly in the last three years in response to the dramatic shift from years of abundant economic growth to a state of survival for Southern Nevada's workforce. As one of only two WIBs serving the state, our close cooperation with Nevadaworks, the WIB serving Northern Nevada, allows us to align policies and programs to assure effective services across the diverse geography and local economies of the state. Specific examples of Workforce Connections' initiatives and data trends are presented in this testimony to illustrate how Workforce Investment Act initiatives are impacting Southern Nevada communities.

Nevada is suffering from the worst unemployment rates in the country (a high of 14.9% in 2010); a grim real estate outlook, both commercially and residentially; the collapse of our construction industry and severe downturn of gaming and hospitality; and the highest dropout rates in the country. If you're looking for the stark definition of the Great Recession, you can find it here. Responding to these challenges, Workforce Connections and our partners have deployed a range of efforts to aid in job creation, upgrading skills and intensive support to job seekers. The need for timely and sustainable recovery in this region has never been greater, and designing and implementing creative and customized solutions locally, where opportunities and resources are well understood, has proven to be a highly effective model for the workforce system. The performance of our regional workforce system over the last four years, in spite of the negative economic environment, has been truly impressive. Attached to our written testimony are graphs of our performance over those four years. Here is a quick extract: in the program year which ended just two months ago, our WIA formula Adult program had an entered employment rate of 72% against a goal of 63%. Our retention rate was 82% against a goal of 70%. Our average earnings were \$11,771 against a goal of \$11,500. In our Dislocated Worker program, entered employment was 76% against a goal of 70%, retention rate was 86% against a goal of 80%, and average earnings were \$14,060 against a goal of \$14,500. In our WIA formula Youth program, placement in employment or education was 78% against a goal of 40%, attainment of degree or certificate was 63% against a goal of 40%, and literacy and numeracy gains were 23% against a goal of 29%.

We look forward to a robust consideration of appropriate performance measures as part of the WIA Reauthorization discussions. I would note here that while our focus has recently, and rightfully, turned to job placement as an outcome, the importance of skills credentials, certificates and diplomas should not be minimized. In an increasingly competitive global economy, demand-driven credentials will be an important passport to career success.

## Aligning Economic Development and Workforce Development at the local level

Policy and program flexibility at the local level allows successful WIBs to implement and continuously improve new programs that keep pace with the dynamic real time evolution of local and regional economies. WIA Reauthorization should include a thorough elimination of the numerous outdated and obsolete provisions and traditions that hamper the ability of local WIBs to keep pace with the needs of business and labor in the new economy, and do not improve performance accountability in any meaningful way. As local and state economic development and workforce development systems increasingly align, the timely input from businesses, labor, education and elected officials that drives successful WIBs can be a tremendous asset to intersystem alignment if WIBs are empowered to move at leadership speed with their partners. With economic and workforce development alignment, participation from private businesses, labor and education, and demand-driven industry sector strategies hitting the ground in Southern Nevada, economic recovery is moving forward along the road to long term sustainability.

Southern Nevada utilizes the resources of the Workforce Investment Board and its partners to put ideas into action. These resources include a broad spectrum of current information and experienced thinking from a wide variety of community partnerships that are:

- Coordinating training providers, educational institutions, business sectors, organized labor and a diverse group of support agencies to respond to the needs of job seekers
- Identifying market driven strategies relevant to Southern Nevada employers
- Supporting businesses with growth strategies, layoff aversion, placement of qualified applicants in new positions, or retraining existing employees for expanding opportunities
- Helping rural communities achieve successful and sustainable local niches within the regional economy
- Committed to building a community ethic that values education and preparing the future workforce for successful careers

### Example: Foliot Furniture

Starting in 2009 Easter Seals of Southern Nevada, a funded partner of Workforce Connections, placed approximately 70 participants in a WIA On The Job Training Program to help Foliot Furniture, a manufacturer of green-commercial furniture, expand their business into a facility in southeast Las Vegas. The successful program not only helped workers gain employment but also created jobs in the emerging green economy sector; a sector recognized for its economic potential to diversify the local economy and provide substantive career growth opportunities.

## Workforce Connections: shoulder to shoulder with business and labor on the front lines of a changing economy

Local workforce systems have the information and service networks to respond immediately to local employment shifts. The most dramatic loss of jobs and business in Southern Nevada has occurred in the construction and gaming/hospitality industries. In 2010, over 30% of construction jobs in Nevada disappeared. The completion of major projects like City Center and the Hoover Dam Bypass dovetailed with the cancellation of planned undertakings such as the Echelon and Fontainebleau resorts and the lack of funding for other needed infrastructure projects to decimate the construction trades. At the same time, traditional visitors from across the country lost personal income, resulting in layoffs throughout the hospitality and retail sectors. To offset the loss of these and other jobs, Workforce Connections has deployed industry sector strategies to transition workers into emerging markets that can better diversify the regional economy while building career pathways for its workers.

### Example: Rapid response efforts at the Sahara Hotel and Casino - 1,000 workers terminated at once

Workforce Connections conducted three Employment Edge workshops for the Sahara Hotel and Casino employees being laid off with the closing of the property in May of 2011. Thirty days prior to the closing, three-hour workshops were held covering career self assessment, resume writing, online job search, interviewing techniques and a number of other topics

related to securing new employment. In addition, staff from Workforce Connections, DETR/One Stop Center, Nevada Partners Inc., AFL-CIO, AARP, NV Energy, and several other agencies were present to connect the employees to additional services and training, with the goal of easing and speeding their transitions to new jobs, in a classic example of the kind of crisis performance that local WIBs have been carrying out across the country for years, out of the limelight but right where the action is in the process of economic renewal.

Let me return briefly to the issue of infrastructure investment. There is a golden opportunity for a high ROI (Return on Investment) infrastructure strategy in the Intermountain Southwest, a region of which Southern Nevada is the hub. It has been said that Las Vegas used to be in the middle of nowhere, and now it is in the middle of everywhere. Projections are that the Southwest will continue to have relatively high population growth rates for the foreseeable future, but the infrastructure to support critical transportation, energy development and transmission, and water resource management is not keeping pace. We previously mentioned the completion of the Hoover Dam Bypass Bridge, and we hope you have the opportunity to take the short trip out just past Boulder City to see this latest wonder of American engineering and construction. But it is a 21<sup>st</sup> century bridge shackled by a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century highway. Las Vegas and Phoenix remain the largest adjacent American cities not connected by an interstate highway. In the other direction, nearly half of the goods imported into this country now come through the ports of Southern California. Much of that cargo is transported across the Southwest, destined to be increasingly bottlenecked by insufficient highways and railroads. Anyone who has driven Interstate 15 between Los Angeles and Las Vegas is amazed at the lack of passenger rail service in that corridor. As alternative energy sources are developed in the Southwest, transmission infrastructure is about to become a key consideration. And the movement of water to meet the growing needs of cities, industries and agriculture in the Southwest will continue to require new capacity for storage and distribution.

That's an impressive list of infrastructure needs, and the construction collapse in the Southwest has left in place a highly skilled workforce in the construction trades and building related professions. A portfolio of infrastructure projects across the Southwest could benefit from and help sustain a highly skilled workforce, and build a foundation for prosperity across a region that some demographers are referring to as the New American Heartland.

## **Strategic efforts to develop Southern Nevada's Health Care Sector**

As in many parts of the United States, the health care sector is and will remain a strong segment of local economies. The sector will continue to provide many family wage jobs, as well as the career ladders and lattices that make those jobs accessible to many workers in a system with well-designed, relevant training programs. The Nevada Health Care Sector Council was established in response to Nevada Senate Bill 239. This legislation required industry sector councils to convene for the purpose of identifying needs and practices that best meet regional economic development goals. Working closely with the State Workforce Investment Board, the council identifies and supports job training and education programs, and is charged with informing the State WIB of health care organizations that have the greatest likelihood of meeting regional workforce development and economic goals.

To do this, the council is engaged with health care industry leaders in defining and addressing their workforce challenges and with that input, developing programs to align worker skills with industry needs. Council participants are representative of Nevada's health care, labor, education, business and government sectors. By promoting collaboration and encouraging the private sector to take ownership and investment in industry growth, the council is helping to ensure the long-term competitiveness of the health care sector in providing care to local communities and contributing to Nevada's economic health.

**Example: Work Session with Health and Human Services**

Members of the Nevada Health Care Sector Council recently met with Herb Shultz, Regional Director of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to discuss Nevada's determinant statistics. Dr. John Packham, from the University of Nevada Reno, presented health care minimum data sets for key professionals in Nevada. Holly Balmer and Dr. Hyla Winter, from the Nevada System of Higher Education, highlighted a survey sent to public and private institutions of higher education. Mr. Shultz shared information regarding health care reform and offered suggestions as to how the Council could benefit from upcoming funding opportunities and training programs for long-term unemployed health care professionals.

## Green Economy Sector Strategy

In support of statewide energy sector strategies, state energy policies and the Governor's overall workforce vision, Workforce Connections has an integrated team dedicated to developing Southern Nevada's energy efficiency and renewable resource workforce. Strategic alignment with Nevada's economic development agencies provides partnership possibilities with new employers requiring workers equipped with green skill sets that lead to job opportunities for Nevada's dislocated workers. The existing WIA funded partners network plays a key role in identifying adult participants seeking green job training.

Youth participants in local WIA programs are taking part in the Nevada State Energy Sector Partnership (SESP) pre-apprenticeship green curriculum intended to expose them to green career pathways. Designed with an accessible "plain English" approach, the curriculum covers principles of renewable energy, energy efficiency, energy generation and conservation, recycling, food supply chains, water conservation, and other sustainable practices.

### Example: Ganix Bio-Technologies

The Latin Chamber of Commerce is currently running an On The Job Training program with the innovative aquaculture company, Ganix Bio-Technologies that has built a 30,000-square-foot shrimp farm just 30 miles north of the Las Vegas strip. Participants in the program are being exposed to the cutting-edge sustainable farming concepts in a unique example of how Southern Nevada can supplant job losses by supplying the skilled workforce needed to fulfill capacity in the green economy sector.

## Youth Development efforts to build our future workforce

With a focus on preparing the future workforce, Workforce Connections coordinates many efforts to motivate and support youth in Southern Nevada toward educational success and career readiness. The primary goals of this effort are to increase Nevada's high school graduation rate and encourage a community ethic that values education.

Workforce Connections is proudly working with the Nevada Public Education Foundation and partners across the state to align youth development programs with the research-based Ready for Life / Shared Youth Vision policy framework, including recently reorganizing our several WIB youth programs to be consistent with that framework. With the strong support of Governor Sandoval and community leaders throughout Nevada, the Ready for Life movement is uniting the business and education communities in a common effort that recognizes the necessity of education and workforce training as the foundation of our future economy.

Workforce Connections is currently building a partnership with the new leadership of the Clark County School District (CCSD), one of the largest and most challenged school districts in the nation, as they launch a major initiative to increase the high school graduation rate. Their plans to improve the performance of Southern Nevada students involve individual assessment plans to define and overcome deficiencies, regular connection with adults to track progress and provide guidance, and participation from the community in mentoring students towards post-secondary success. Toward this last element, Workforce Connections is actively convening the business community as well as community service organizations specializing in youth development in meeting the demand for meaningful connections to the workplace.

### **Example: Project 5000 Kids Job Shadow Day, February 2, 2011**

Nevada's high school graduation rate ranks last in the country. Project 5000 Kids (P5K) aspired to make Nevada first in something positive by participating in National Job Shadow Day. On February 2, 2010 P5K **paired 3,127 students with 90 Southern Nevada business locations** and succeeded in hosting **the largest Job Shadow Day effort in the nation**.

Participating companies included the City of Henderson, the Southern Nevada Water Authority, Las Vegas Review Journal, Desert View Hospital in Pahrump, Station Casinos, MGM Resorts International, and Caesars Entertainment. Students from 49 schools from Panaca to Pahrump got behind-the-scenes exposure to career opportunities available to them if they stay in school.

Dr. Lisa A. Edler, Community Partnership Coordinator for East Career and Technical Academy noted, "The gratitude is still brimming over today and the messages of 'stay in school' and 'go to college' were equally emphasized by each employer. It was the most successful event I have seen teachers and students attend in CCSD." As a direct result of the event, a number of students have applied for internships at the businesses they visited. Southwest Career and Technical Academy connected with representatives from Mandalay Bay and has invited them to serve on an advisory board for their Culinary and Hospitality programs. Business executives too were inspired by the caliber of students they got to meet and have a new confidence in our future workforce. "We don't always get to see the best of young people today, as negative attention tends to dominate the media," Said Rachel Kryder of BEC Environmental, Inc., "It made me feel very optimistic to be reminded of all the hard working and enthusiastic students out there that too often are overshadowed."

### **Example: The Green Monster Truck**

In a fine example of local program collaboration and strategic alignment, YouthBuild Las Vegas and the Nevada SESP team have piloted a unique green energy training program for youth know as the Green Monster Truck. Being launched into full service for program year 2011, the Green Monster Truck is a mobile classroom powered by the sun. Equipped with solar arrays and batteries that power on-board training systems, the truck is a hands-on experience that teaches renewable wind and solar energy generation, electrical wiring and residential energy auditing concepts using the very same tools and techniques used by professional energy auditors in the field.

## **Local leadership from business, labor and education**

Another key strength of the WIA system is the strong role of local business, labor and education leaders and organizations in developing relevant, demand-driven strategies and training programs, as well as providing experienced and skilled oversight of the investments and business processes of local WIBs. In addition to the majority business leadership on the Board of Directors, Workforce Connections works continuously with local chambers of commerce and professional development organizations to gather real-time information on the workforce issues affecting day-to-day business while promoting programs that support job growth and retention to employers.

Our continuous business outreach efforts include current partnerships with:

- Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trustees and several committees
- North Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, Board of Directors
- Henderson Chamber of Commerce, organized Business Roundtable summit
- Boulder City Chamber of Commerce
- Mesquite Chamber of Commerce
- Las Vegas Latin Chamber of Commerce
- Las Vegas Asian Chamber of Commerce
- Urban Chamber of Commerce
- Women's Chamber of Commerce of Nevada
- Nevada Development Authority

- Nevada Restaurant Association
- Nevada Staffing Association
- Southern Nevada Human Resource Association

#### **Example: Business Roundtables**

In a grassroots economic development effort Workforce Connections has convened a nine-part series of business roundtable discussions for business owners, managers and professionals. Partnered with local chambers of commerce, the roundtables host a panel of economic and business experts who share information on the current state of affairs and future economic outlook of Southern Nevada followed by a dialogue with attendees to develop actionable projects intended to provide positive and enterprising benefits to local businesses. The series expects to host 1,000 attendees by the end of 2011.

## **In conclusion**

Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller, we will conclude by offering you our continued cooperation and support as you chart the future of the federal workforce system. In Southern Nevada, we know that it works. While we have had the nation's highest unemployment rate for some time, we now also have the most rapidly declining unemployment rate. The resources of the WIA system and the local partnerships it supports have been a successful part of that progress. The timely infusion of additional formula funds and new ARRA funding was absolutely critical to our region's ability to expand and improve vital workforce services at the most critical moment in decades. Local flexibility is a key strength of the system, and should be reflected in the rethinking of everything from WIB membership requirements to outdated funding silos to the percentage of system funding that reaches the local level, where the information and action is. Another key strength of WIA is its reach into the future workforce. Again, the ability to customize strategies at the community, school district and neighborhood levels is paramount, and the importance of strong summer youth employment programs in linking educational success and workforce readiness is evident nationwide.

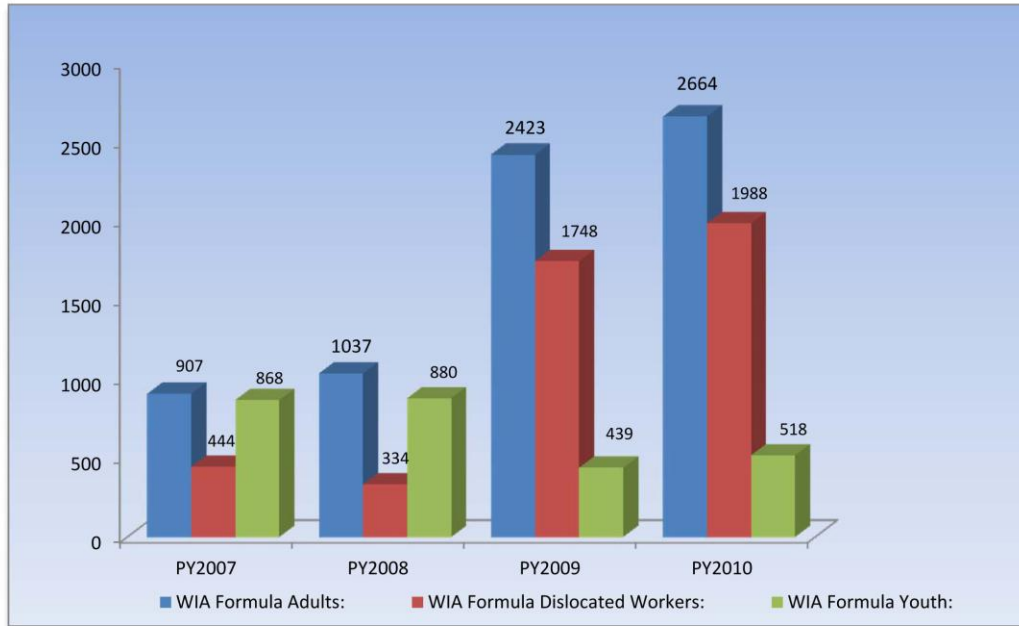
Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. Enjoy your visit in Southern Nevada, and Godspeed on your journey home.

## Measurement of performance

The following pages include graphical information representing Program Years 2007-2010 historical Common Measures Performance for people served by Workforce Connections.

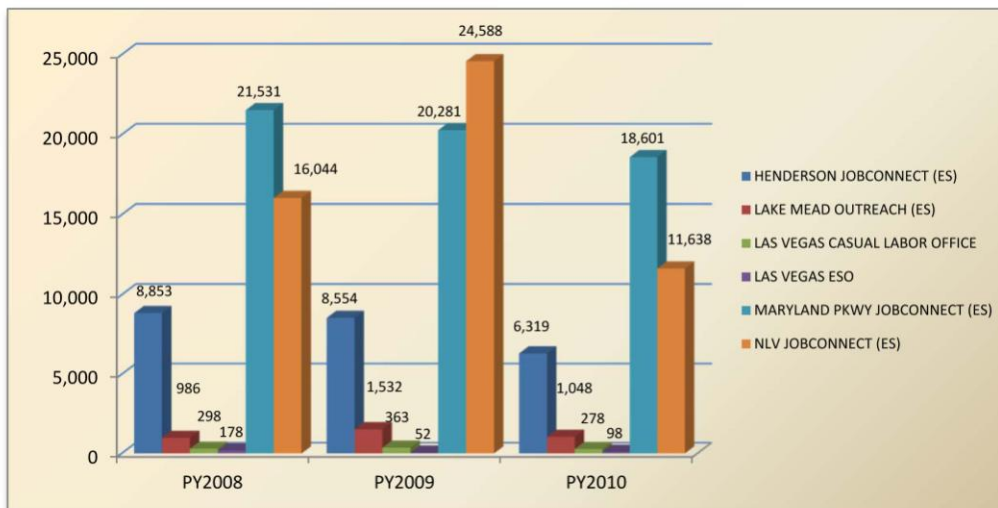
### Clients Served

#### WIA Clients Served



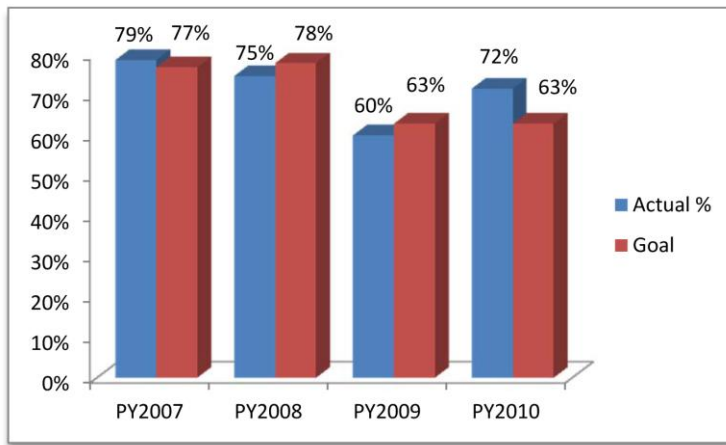
Note: Program years 2009/2010 includes ARRA Stimulus clients as well.

#### One-stop Center Clients Served

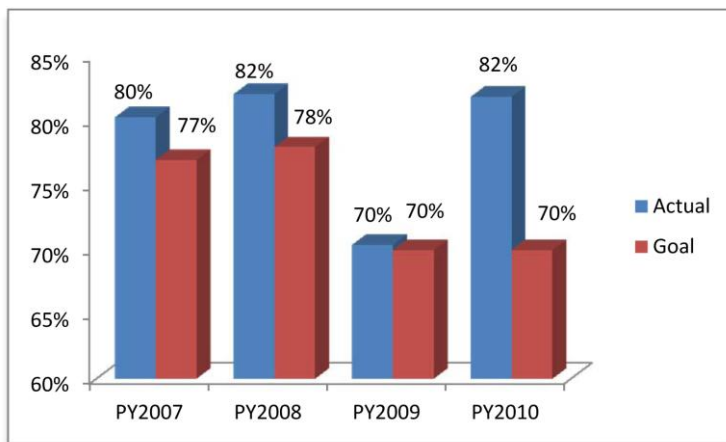


### WIA Formula Adult Program (Program Years 2007-2010)

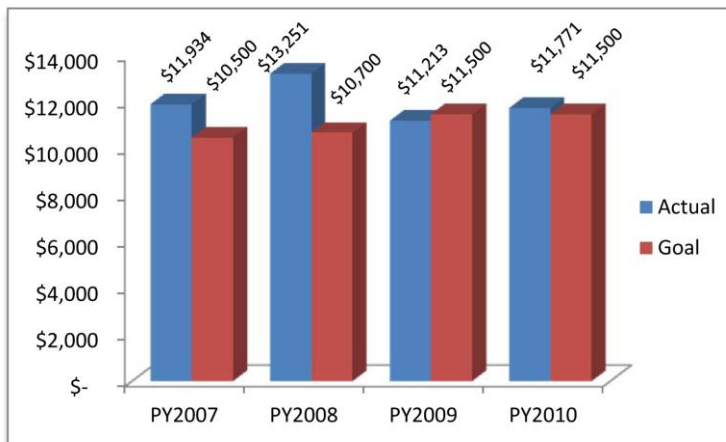
#### Entered Employment



#### Retention Rate



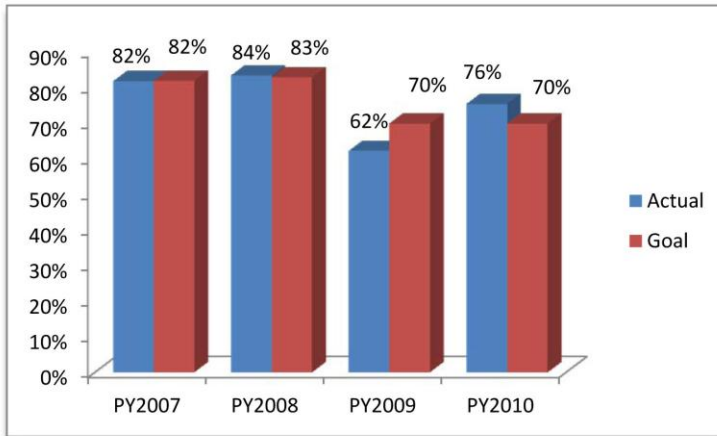
#### Average Earnings (6 months)



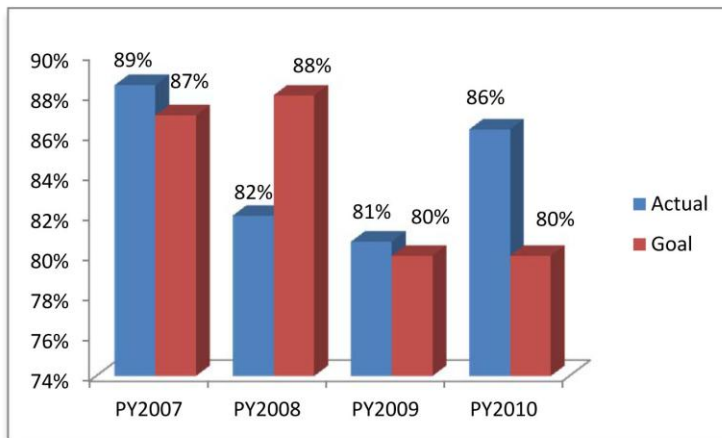


## WIA Formula Dislocated Worker Program (Program Years 2007-2010)

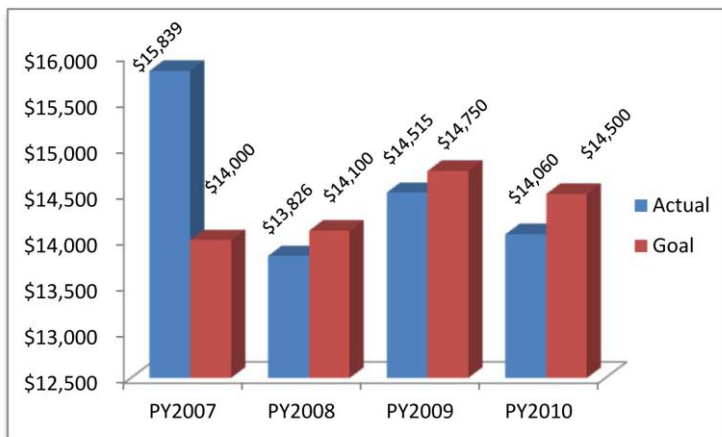
### Entered Employment



### Retention Rate

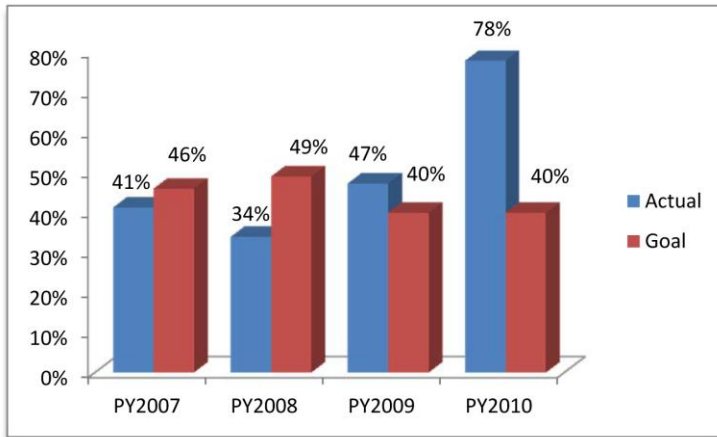


### Average Earnings

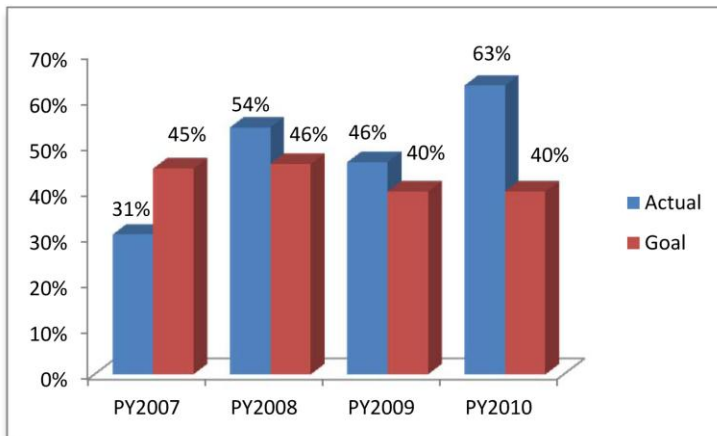


## WIA Formula Year-round Youth Program (Program Years 2007-2010)

### Placement in Employment or Education



### Attainment of Degree or Certificate



### Literacy and Numeracy Gains

