



OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Minutes

February 17, 2026

4:00 p.m.

Location: Lynwood Roberts Room

In attendance: Chair Freeman, Vice Chair Amaro, Council Members Arias and White

Also: Council Member Johnson, John Everett, Kids Hope Alliance (Director of Workforce Development & College Career Readiness); Carla Schell, Office of General Counsel; Brandon Russell, Council Research

Meeting Convened: 4:00 p.m.

Meeting Call to Order

Chair Freeman called the meeting to order.

Purpose of Meeting

Chair Freeman explained that the meeting would focus on apprenticeships, career pipelines, and expanding employer partnerships and hands-on training opportunities that connect education to in-demand careers. He said the goal of the meeting was to clarify goals, alignment, and what works.

Overview of Focus

He said they will be looking at whether programs are truly aligned with employer demands and whether young people ages 16-24 have the support they need to navigate the transition from school to work.

Provider Presentations

CareerSource Northeast Florida: Doreen Lund

Doreen Lund, Apprenticeship Manager for CareerSource Northeast Florida, provided an overview of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs and standards. She said her role entails growing apprenticeships in the area and connecting job seekers to these opportunities. She said she also partners with the Department of Education and Florida Commerce through Apprenticeship Florida to expand apprenticeships in the state. She stated that apprenticeships are a successful workforce model because they are a win-win for job seekers and employers.

Ms. Lund explained that today's apprenticeships are innovative and focused on pathways to high-wage, high-need careers. She added that they are expanding because there is a need for skilled talent. She said that apprenticeships are growing in non-traditional industries and occupations, but that the model itself has not changed. Apprentices still work with a mentor, engage in scholastic and hands-on learning, and earn wages as they learn, without incurring educational expenses.

Ms. Lund then explained that registered apprenticeships are programs registered with the state's Department of Education, and individuals who complete the program earn a certification that is valid nationwide. She said Florida has 344 registered apprenticeship programs (RAPs) and 70 pre-apprenticeship programs with over 2,000 participating employers. She added that the average starting wage upon completion of a program is \$58,000.

Ms. Lund then explained pre-apprenticeship programs, organized programs of instruction offered within a public school system or other setting that prepare individuals to become apprentices. She explained that there are registered pre-apprenticeship programs and unregistered pre-apprenticeships, also known as occupational prep programs. She explained that before pre-apprenticeship programs can be created, they must identify a relevant RAP for students to enter. She added that they must also determine if criteria exist for the pre-apprenticeships and whether RAPs would accept students who complete a pre-apprenticeship program. She said they were planning to change some rules regarding pre-apprenticeships in the coming months.

She said there are instances where an occupational prep course made sense for students. When developing such a course, she said, they consider whether there is already an employer or RAP that values those skills and will hire the students. She said they also consider whether the skills and lessons align with industry standards and whether a credential can be incorporated into the course.

Ms. Lund explained that good candidates for these programs are those seeking a career and who possess a strong work ethic. She also said that commitment to the program's full-time frame was important. She provided links to resources for finding registered programs and employers, as well as for locating apprenticeship occupations and relevant work skills.

CM Amaro asked if pre-apprenticeship programs already exist. Ms. Lund said that programs do exist. CM Amaro then asked who the target was for pre-apprenticeship programs and whether it was redundant to have pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships. Ms. Lund said there was not necessarily a target age group and added that those who complete the scholastic work of a pre-apprenticeship could spend less time in the apprenticeship. Chair Freeman affirmed that the pre-apprenticeship program, especially those available in high schools, can expedite the entire apprenticeship period.

CM Arias asked whether recruiting services were offered and which industries were targeted. Ms. Lund said that some industries were not “apprenticeable” according to the Department of Labor, but said that those roles and industries were still valuable; she provided an example of one person training to become a cook in an assisted living facility. She also said that there were industry standards that must be followed. She added that recruitment was part of her job and said others throughout the state do the same. She said that she sends jobseekers lists of programs every week, highlighting the registered programs. She also said she attends high schools and job fairs for recruitment. CM Arias asked how successful these recruitment efforts were. She said she always leaves the names of interested individuals at events and will even connect them with other organizations there.

Danny Van Sickle, Director of the Electrical Training Alliance, added some details regarding pre-apprenticeships. He stated that his apprenticeship is a four-year program and that they try to avoid having apprentices leave in the middle of it. He said their six-month pre-apprenticeship program has the same curriculum as the first year of the apprenticeship program. At the end of the pre-apprenticeship program, individuals receive a direct interview and, if selected, are advanced to year two of the apprenticeship program. He said this ensures that participants in the apprenticeship program are committed to completing it. He said they also have a program for high schools that allows students to complete the first-year curriculum.

Bridge 2 Work Academy: Jamaal Brown

Mr. Brown explained that the Bridge 2 Work Academy motto is “Positive Experiences. Exposure. Lifestyle.” He provided an overview of the program for students in foster care. The program provides employment readiness, transportation support, and its target audience is individuals ages 16-24. He explained that Chickering’s Seven Vectors serve as the theoretical framework for the program, in particular, developing purpose.

Mr. Brown said the program exists to address barriers experienced by foster youth. To address these barriers, the program offers workforce training, soft skills development, professional exposure, paid internships and apprenticeships, and transportation assistance.

The program structure consists of three cohorts per year, comprised of 10-15 students, and utilizes a hybrid learning model. Mr. Brown provided an overview of the application process and explained how to recruit students. He explained that they work with other community partner organizations, such as Daniel Kids, Jewish Family and Community Services, and the National Youth Advocate Program, to identify students.

Mr. Brown explained that the program begins with New Student Orientation. He said each cohort also has leadership roles that students can fill. Participants also craft a unique cohort identity, including a name, symbol, and call or handshake. He then provided examples of past events, including a financial empowerment workshop and one on attitude and responsibility. The program concludes with a graduation ceremony.

The presentation concluded with a testimony from a past participant, Kimaya Priester.

Committee Discussion

Chair Freeman posed two questions to the committee for discussion:

1. What stood out from the youth testimony about the transition from school to work?
2. What should this Committee prioritize to ensure apprenticeship pathways are industry aligned and accessible to ages 16-24?

CM Arias noted the barrier that transportation issues can pose and suggested more discussion on how to address that. Chair Freeman noted how schools can and should be a platform to launch students into the workforce. He also concurred with CM Arias's observation about transportation and added that students in Duval County can utilize JTA for free, as well as participants in a registered pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship program.

Public Comment

Kirk Barras, President of Jacksonville General Apprenticeship Association, thanked CM Arias for his workforce development legislation. He said that 900 people in their association are working and earning a living wage, including at the new Jaguars Stadium. He urged continued discussions and for registered apprentices to work on City projects.

Meeting adjourned: 4:49 p.m.

Minutes: Brandon Russell, Council Research
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