

**Program Year
2019**

Annual Report



Workforce Development Board
County of Middlesex

**“From Prosperity to
Pandemic”**

Kevin J. Kurdziel
Director

Gabriel A. Lavigne
Chairperson



Executive Summary

On behalf of the Workforce Development Board of Middlesex County, I would like to present our Annual Report for Program Year 2019, “From Prosperity to Pandemic”.

This report demonstrates a sudden and dramatic shift in our local economy. You will notably see a contrast in statistics from the first half of the year, to the second half. From nearly full employment to record high unemployment, from confident projections of growth to economic uncertainty. This shift, mainly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, has had a major impact on our local workforce area. The impact has been far reaching. Businesses both small and large, our workforce, our labor sectors, and our residents, in general, have been affected by the pandemic.

However, the challenges faced during this unprecedented time have also created new opportunities. Although our job centers were closed between April and July, a situation that carries through today, we continue to strategize, collaborate, and provide services virtually. By quickly adapting to this new reality, our staff has maintained a continuity of service where job seekers receive training and businesses work closely with our team to respond to the future economy. Priorities will undoubtedly shift, and new challenges will likely materialize. Our Workforce Development Board continues to demonstrate innovative approaches to respond to the needs of our constituents. As you review this Annual Report, know that our board members are looking ahead, with an eye on new trends and advances that will lead our local economy back to prosperity and strength.

Kevin J. Kurdziel
Director
Workforce Development Board of Middlesex County



Chairperson's Remarks

The Workforce Development Board of Middlesex County, Inc. is proud to present its Annual Report for the Program Year 2019, which concluded on June 30, 2020. This report showcases a local economy that was vibrant and thriving. But with the onset of COVID-19, that climate has changed. From July 1, 2019 until early March 2020, we encountered record low unemployment, a strong economic climate, and the opportunity for further prosperity. The last four months of our program year paint a starkly different picture that displays a significant shift in the economy, with high unemployment and diminished economic vitality.

While these times have been challenging, the Workforce Development Board has embraced this hurdle as an opportunity to serve the residents, jobseekers, and businesses of Middlesex County in new and unique ways. By providing virtual services to our customers, we have maintained our operational continuity and developed innovative strategies to serve both job seekers and businesses in Middlesex County. These new approaches have enabled staff to adapt how they engage customers while aggressively working to help our economy regain its strength. The Workforce Development Board is well suited to navigate the challenges ahead by continuing its commitment to innovation and trend setting strategies to create a world class workforce.

Gabriel A. Lavigne, CRPS®
UBS Financial Services Inc.
Financial Advisor
Retirement Plan Consultant
Portfolio Manager
Chair, Middlesex County WDB

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

Leadership

Gabriel Lavigne, WDB Chairperson

Financial Advisor
UBS Financial Services

Amy Bellisano, WDB Vice Chair

Senior General Manager
Woodbridge Center Property, LLC

Paul Hiler, WDB Secretary

District Manager, Human Resources
Commercial Metals

Business Sector Representatives

Marie Bonamassa, Manager, Life Health Financial Services
Fraser Brothers Group, LLC

Carla Cefalo, Division Head
Middlesex County Business Development and Education

Luis De La Hoz, Manager
MarMar LLC

Dan Frankel, Business Administrator
Borough of Sayreville

Wendy Hornich, Human Resources Manager
Berry Global

Rich Liebler, Chief Administrative Officer
Sansone Auto Mall

Elayne McClaine, Regional Director
New Jersey Small Business Development Center at Rutgers

Nicola Saul Minott, Human Resources Consultant
North Central Jersey Diagnostics & DNA Technologies

Loyce Riggans, District Human Resources
Home Depot

Brian Sant'Angelo
Lincoln Technical Institute

Jill Schiff, Executive Director, Operations
Associated Construction Contractors of NJ

Joanne Vogel, Human Resources Director
XPO Logistics

Community Based Organization Representatives

Gloria Aftanski, President & CPO
United Way of Central Jersey, Inc.

José Montes, CEO
Puerto Rican Action Board

Miriam Ruiz, WFNJ Program Director
Community Child Care Solutions

Education Representatives

Kyle Anderson
Interim Executive Middlesex County Superintendent

Roseann Bucciarelli, Dean, Continuing Education
Middlesex County College

Timothy Timberlake, Principal
New Brunswick Public Schools

Dianne Veilleux, Superintendent
Middlesex County Vocational & Technical High Schools

Elected Officials

Kenneth Armwood, County Commissioner
Middlesex County Board of Commissioners

Government Representatives

Bert Baron, Public Information Officer
The City of New Brunswick

Melyssa Lewis, Director
Middlesex County Human Services

Poo Lin, Workforce Manager
Division of Programs & Services

Angela Mackaronis, Director
Middlesex County Board of Social Services

Mark Schweitzer, Consultant – Business Outreach Team
NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Organized Labor Representatives

Robert Davis, Business Agent
Operating Engineers Local 825

Thomas Iveson, Council Representative
Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters

Thomas Sommers, Director of Outreach and Development
Northeast Carpenters Apprenticeship Fund

Other Representatives

Craig Schlosser, Vice President
Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce & CVB

SUMMARY

The information in this report provides a snap-shot of the Middlesex County Workforce Development Board's actions and accomplishments for PY2019. The Workforce Development Board remains steadfast in adopting and implementing necessary amendments to local policy as set forth by the U.S. Department of Labor, New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the State Employment Training Commission.

During Program Year 2019, the Middlesex County Department of Business, Innovation, and Opportunity welcomed a new Department Head, **Khalid Anjum**, and the Office of Workforce Development rebranded as the **Middlesex County Office of Career Opportunity** – a change meant to best capture a holistic, modern approach to employment and training that goes beyond “getting people to work” and focuses on “prospects for long-term growth and satisfaction for employers and jobseekers alike”. Unfortunately, in spite of a bright and optimistic outlook at the beginning of the year, the Workforce Development Board faced unexpected challenges brought on by a global pandemic that dramatically affected local employment and growth. Despite a drastic shift compared to previous projections and trends, the Board acted swiftly to develop contingency solutions that ensured employers and customers, alike, could reach support when it was most needed.

In Program Year 2020, the Board intends to continue rebuilding from heavy COVID-19 related economic losses, by cooperating with local businesses and training entities, as well as regional and community partners, to form coalitions in shared pursuit of continued, uninterrupted workforce development. Beyond seeking funding opportunities as a local government entity, the Workforce Development Board is currently in the final stages of applying for 501(c)(3) non-profit status, which would afford additional opportunities and expand community reach.

Finally, the Middlesex County Workforce Development Board continues to work closely with its regional partners (Mercer, Monmouth, and Ocean Counties) as part of the Central Jersey Partners regional WDB consortium. This alliance presents many opportunities for collaboration, including exploration of cost and resource sharing that will enable to explore ways to operate more effective and efficiently in our local areas.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY AT A GLANCE

MIDDLESEX COUNTY'S WORKFORCE

- **827,684** residents as of 2019, projected to grow by another 3,145 within 5 years.
- Total regional employment grew by 6.4% to **457,885**, with expected growth by 16,139 jobs within 5 years.
- Following the COVID-19 pandemic, **398,756** of the labor force remain employed while **30,838** are unemployed.
- Median household income of **\$86,000** -- \$27,500 above the national median.
- Gross Regional Product of **\$66.99B**, representing **10.2%** of the state's GRP.

Trends in Job Growth

From 2015 to 2020, jobs increased by **6.4%** in Middlesex County, from 430,236 to **457,885**. This change outpaced the national growth rate of 6.2% by 0.2%, and growth is projected to continue, with an estimated **474,024** jobs by 2025.

The greatest numbers of unique job postings fall in the sectors of **Transportation, Tech, Healthcare, Management, and Sales**.

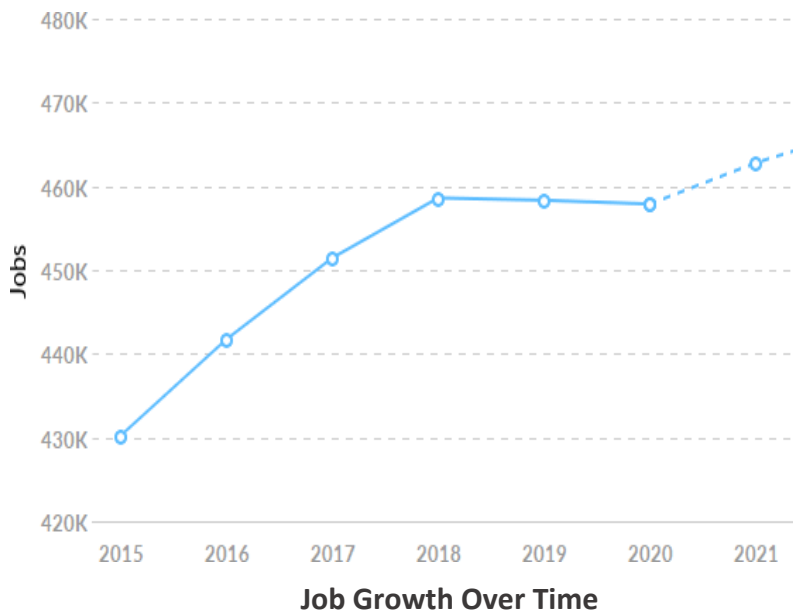
An Educated Workforce

89.5% of Middlesex County residents possess at minimum a high school diploma. **42.5%** possess a Bachelor's degree or higher.

In 2019, there were **16,433** graduates from Middlesex County institutions of higher education. Of this number, **13,331** graduated from **Rutgers University, New Brunswick**, and **1,465** from **Middlesex College**.

This pipeline has grown by **5%** over the last 5 years.

The highest share of these graduates come from Social Work, Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies, and General Psychology.



Changes in Unemployment

The unemployment rate at the end of calendar year 2019 was **3.10%**, one of the lowest rates in the state.

Due to the direct and indirect influence of COVID-19 on the economy, the unemployment rate as of June 30, 2020 rose to **9.45%**.

Source: EMSI

MIDDLESEX COUNTY’S PRINCIPAL BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRIES

71,156 Companies Employ Our Workers Locally

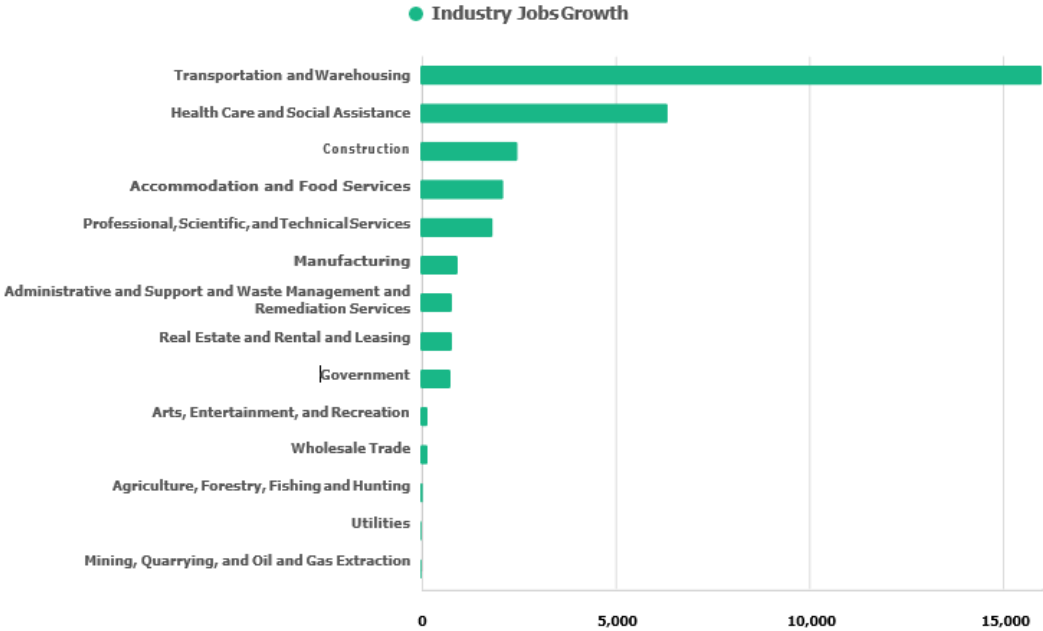
Online profiles for our workforce mention **71,156** companies as employers, with the top 5 appearing below (left). Based on job postings in the last 12 months, **7,972** companies in Middlesex County are hiring, with the top 5 by quantity appearing below (right).

Top Companies	Profiles	Top Companies Posting	Unique Postings
Rutgers University	3,401	Rutgers University	5,546
Robert Wood Johnson	1,343	Oracle Corporation	5,231
Bank of America Corporation	1,115	Amazon.com, Inc.	3,201
Verizon Communications Inc.	962	Meridian Health, Inc.	1,694
Johnson & Johnson	944	Bristol-Myers Squibb	1,569

The Workforce Development Board continually monitors the local labor market and designates High Labor Demand Occupations according to real time data. These designations enable the Middlesex County Office of Workforce Development to offer training programs in growth industries where employment opportunities exist and future expansion is anticipated.

The top five industries in Middlesex County based on hourly earnings are **Management, Legal, Computer and Mathematical Architecture and Engineering, Healthcare, and Business and Financial Operations**. These differ somewhat from the top five industries by job growth: **Transportation and Warehousing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, Construction, Accommodation and Food Services, and Professional Services**.

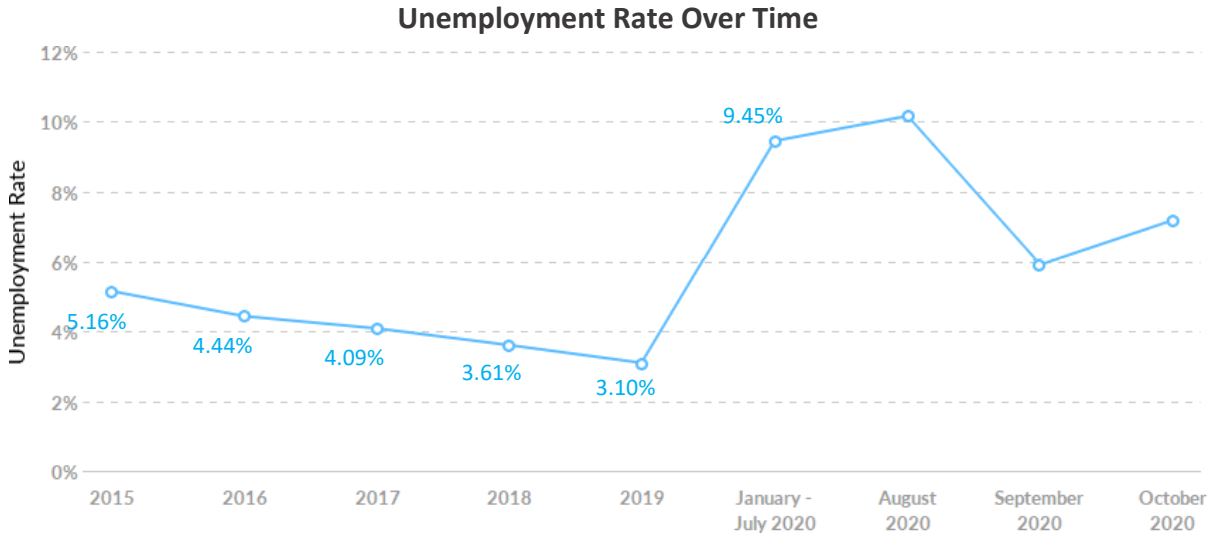
Top Growing Industries



Source: EMSI

PANDEMIC EFFECTS ON MIDDLESEX COUNTY’S LABOR FORCE

Through the early months of calendar year 2020, Middlesex County’s unemployment rate continued to trend downwards, consistently one of the lowest in the state. However, due to an unexpected and devastating global pandemic that hit our region in early Q4, the unemployment rate tripled from a low of 3.10% at the end of 2019, to 9.45% in the first half of calendar year 2020.



Source: EMSI

Low wage occupations were hit the hardest and, likewise, have had the slowest recovery. According to data from Harvard University’s “Track the Recovery” project, **April to May** saw the economic nadir of the pandemic with respect to employment in Middlesex County, with high wage workers (earning above \$60,000 per year) seeing an **8.7%** drop in employment; middle wage workers (earning between \$27,000 and \$60,000) seeing a **24.9%** drop in employment; and low wage workers (earning below \$27,000) seeing a **41.2%** drop in employment. By **June 30, 2020**, high wage earners’ employment was **within 1%** of January 2020 levels, while the bottom quartile remained **nearly a quarter below** January’s employment.

While COVID-19’s impact certainly presents a challenge and a threat to Middlesex County’s economy and population, it also offers an opportunity for the Workforce Development Board to target the population most affected by the pandemic and help them transition into better paying, more resilient careers in in-demand occupations, in our growing industries.

BUSINESS SOLUTIONS TEAM

The Middlesex County Office of Workforce Development reorganized its Business Resource Center (Business Engagement Team) by changing its name to **Business Solutions Team** (BST), consisting of both County and State staff. The BST is responsible for establishing and cultivating relationships with local and regional businesses in order to meet their training and hiring needs.

This has been accomplished in multiple ways, including monthly on-site employee recruitment events, job fairs, direct referrals, and disseminating information via social media.

WORKED WITH SEVERAL BUSINESSES THAT OPENED NEW LOCATIONS IN MIDDLESEX COUNTY
 Taco Bell
 Papa John’s
 Census 2020

Due to the COVID pandemic, the BST has now gone virtual with remote, web-based information sessions and job fairs with employers. In addition, the BST works closely with the NJ Department of Labor staff in order to receive input and feedback from businesses regarding industry specific trends impacting their workforces.

Notably, in spite of the pandemic, 2020 Census activities began in the spring and early summer of 2020, and we were involved in many levels, committee wise and organizing recruitments and job fairs, beginning in early 2019 and carrying through 2020. Enumeration and other activities in Middlesex County were successful, thanks in no small part to the minimum 1100 Census employees hired due to BST efforts.

CANDIDATES WERE RECRUITED FOR			
Altice	Drive Medical	Health Care	Posigen
Amazing Deliveries	Dungarvin	Marion Security	Securitas Security
Census 2020	Edustaff	Agency	Services
Centimark	FedEX	Millwood Inc.	Taco Bell
Department of Corrections	HMS Host	Panda Express	UPS
	Home Instead	Plastipak Packaging	

The Workforce Development Board met Quarterly, providing guidance on the county’s demand labor clusters, linking economic development and workforce development programs, researching emerging industries, and monitoring local, regional, and state employment trends.

RECRUITMENTS PY19:	# OF EVENTS	# OF ATTENDEES	HIRED
Q1 (Jul-Sep)	32	281	8*
Q2 (Oct-Dec)	51	260	8*
Q3-Q4 (Jan-Jun)	0	0	0
Total:	83	541	16²

² Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Business Solutions Team has been unable to do extensive follow up to ascertain the most current hiring statistics from employers. Further, as the pandemic progressed a lot of the employers were closed or in some of cases contacts in human resources were lost due to layoffs.

WIOA ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER

The Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides training to eligible individuals with opportunities to develop new skills leading to nationally recognized credential attainment and employment. The WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs are designed to help those who are unemployed or underemployed. These customers received training in occupation sectors delineated by the New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development as in demand.

Career Counselors are typically available at our One Stop Career Centers to assist job seekers with services that include but are not limited to:

- Career exploration, guidance, and counseling
- Job search and job retention assistance
- Résumé, cover letter, and job application assistance
- Interview preparation
- Free occupational skills training grants
- Basic skills remediation and computer literacy
- Case management and follow-up services
- and more

In light of COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions on in-person services, WIOA Career Counselors transitioned to offering all these services and more, remotely, over the phone and by using virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Q4 numbers reflect a decline in customers served related to both exhaustion of funding and initial COVID-19 related limitations on services.

ACTIVITY/SERVICE	Q1 (Jul-Sep)	Q2 (Oct-Dec)	Q3 (Jan-Mar)	Q4 (Apr-Jun)	TOTALS
CERTIFICATIONS	173	84	116	14	387
CASAS TESTS ADMINISTERED	126	82	104	3	315
ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED	158	68	108	23	357
BASIC SKILLS ENROLLMENTS BY START DATE	14	6	11	0	31
ADULT FUNDS	2	1	4	0	7
DW FUNDS	12	5	7	0	24
ITA ENROLLMENTS BY START DATE	41	31	47	9	128
ADULT FUNDS	16	11	11	2	40
DW FUNDS	25	20	36	7	88

WIOA YOUTH

E.L.I.T.E. Program Highlights

Participants	Program/Activity
160	Certifications for E.L.I.T.E. (Entry Level Internships Training and Employment) Youth Eligibility
79	Enrollments in Work Experience, HSE Preparation, Basic Skills Remediation and/or Post-Secondary Education (Occupational Training)
88	Educational attainments, including 18 HSE diplomas, 12 other credentials, 24 educational skills gains, and 34 program completions

In light of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the ELITE Youth Program transitioned all services to virtual, continuing to service clientele while obeying government guidelines and prioritizing public health and hygiene. In spite of an unprecedented challenge that naturally affected both enrollment and distribution of services, the ELITE Youth program was able to place **one** young adult in a Work Based Learning Experience at the **Middlesex County Regional Chamber of Commerce** in New Brunswick. Additionally, during this time, **twelve** (12) youth were enrolled into the first fully remote cycle of the High School Equivalency (HSE) program, while several others were enrolled in Occupational Skills Training.

Industry Tours are an integral part of the ELITE Program that familiarize youth with various occupations and the companies and industries located in Middlesex County. Although these tours normally take place in-person, the ELITE Youth Program adapted to the post-COVID environment and held its first virtual industry tour to the **Amazon Facility**. The tour was educational, informative, and well-received, and it laid the groundwork for future virtual tours, which may continue to offer an alternative or supplement when in-person tours resume.



WORKFORCE LEARNING LINK (WLL)

At the Workforce Learning Links, customers can access computer-based instructor-assisted training in either morning or afternoon instruction sessions.

The WLLs are located within the Middlesex County One-Stop Career Centers in New Brunswick and Perth Amboy and, outside of pandemic restrictions, are open from 8:30 to 4:15 PM five days a week. For the last quarter of PY2019, both WLLs transitioned to fully remote learning using existing software, such as Aztec and SkillUp™, along with Zoom instruction and other virtual correspondence. Q4 numbers reflect a drop in in-person attendance due to COVID-19 related closures and the implementation of virtual learning.

As of July 2019, the WLLs have ceased offering the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in favor of the WIOA-compliant Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test, as the assessment to determine educational level and measure educational gains. Beginning in late PY 2019, proctors were trained and given the capability to securely administer the CASAS test remotely.

Program Year 2019 Enrollment *(New Brunswick and Perth Amboy)*

Q1 Jul-Sep	Q2 Oct-Dec	Q3 Jan-Mar	Q4 Ap-Jun	TOTALS
NB 19 PA 26	NB 5 PA 13	NB 27 PA 20	NB 9 PA 0	NB 60 PA 59 Combined 119

SKILLUP™ MIDDLESEX

The Workforce Development Board is committed to serving all residents of Middlesex County that are either seeking new career opportunities or interested in upgrading their knowledge and skills to align with the competencies that businesses require.

In light of an unprecedented pandemic that led to a stark spike in unemployment mid-Program Year, SkillUp™ Middlesex enabled the Middlesex County Office of Career Opportunity to immediately respond to a surge in need for remote, web-based training aligned with in-demand skills. This on-line learning platform continues to provide County residents with access to over 5,500 online courses, many of which ultimately lead to industry recognized certifications and credentials. This cutting edge technology allows County residents access to training without having to walk into one of our Career One Stop Centers – a fact all the more important during a period when unemployment was high and the One Stop Centers were unable to offer in-person services at all. Through this innovation, the WDB ensures that Middlesex County’s workforce is qualified, skilled and ready for placement into sustainable employment that lead to career pathways – an observation that has led other Counties and the State to look into incorporating SkillUp into workforce development and training programs statewide.

SkillUp™ Middlesex Activity

July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020

	Q1 July-Sept 2019	Q2 Oct-Dec 2019	Q3 Jan-March 2020	Q4 April-June 2020	Total
Total # Accounts Registered	384	291	469	700	1844
Total # Customers completed 1+ course	203	166	210	166	745
Total # Courses Completed	1457	1255	2132	1406	6250
Total # Hrs. on Completed Courses	1409.4	1149.4	2277.2	1662.3	6498.3
Avg. Completions per customer	7	8	10	9	8
Avg. Hours per customer	7	7	10	10	8
Content Summary					
ProveIT Completions	41	17	179	104	341
SkillSoft Completions	1400	1212	1952	1302	5866

PROGRAM FUNDING

PROGRAM YEAR 2019			
<i>(As of June 30, 2020)</i>			
FUNDING STREAM	PY17	PY18	PY19
Adult	\$1,194,231	\$1,054,167	\$1,145,826
Youth <i>(includes work experience funding)</i>	\$1,414,148	\$1,269,481	\$1,346,084
Dislocated Worker	\$ 2,033,843	\$ 1,838,067	\$ 1,778,241
Workforce Learning Link	\$ 407,000	\$ 233,000	\$ 270,000
WFNJ: TANF <i>(includes Case Management)</i>	\$ 1,174,439	\$1,237,792	\$1,237,792
WFNJ CAVP	\$ 6,000	\$ 34,340	\$ 34,340
WFNJ: Work Verification	\$-	\$ 34,000	\$ 34,000
WFNJ: Needs Based Pay	\$ 26,500	\$ 25,500	\$ 55,420
WFNJ: GA/SNAP	\$639,481	\$697,370	\$697,370
Smart Steps	\$ 1,605	\$3,210	\$3,210
TOTALS	\$6,897,247	\$ 6,426,927	\$ 6,602,283

In the upcoming year, the Middlesex County WDB will use any and all criteria established by the State Employment and Training Commission regarding skill level and competency guidelines to be used as a basis for the selection of skill training programs and competency curriculum in the local areas.

APPENDIX A

NEGOTIATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

PY 2018 and PY 2019 Targets:

The **Middlesex County Workforce Area** WIOA Title I and Title III performance targets for PY 2018 and PY 2019 are provided below as negotiated by the New Jersey Department of Labor, and the Middlesex County Workforce Development Board.

Adults	PY 2019 Targets	PY 2019 Outcomes
Employment Rate 2 nd Quarter After Exit	76.6%	76.8%
Employment Rate 4 th Quarter After Exit	77.1%	74.7%
Credential Attainment 4 th Quarter After Exit	69.0%	54.4%
Median Earnings 2 nd Quarter After Exit	\$6,167.00	\$5,782.74
Dislocated Workers	PY 2019 Targets	PY 2019 Outcomes
Employment Rate 2 nd Quarter After Exit	76.8%	66.8%
Employment Rate 4 th Quarter After Exit	76.7%	68.5%
Credential Attainment 4 th Quarter After Exit	74.0%	67.1%
Median Earnings 2 nd Quarter After Exit	\$8,031.00	\$8,981.80
Youth	PY 2019 Targets	PY 2019 Outcomes
Employment Rate 2 nd Quarter After Exit	64.3%	70.3%
Employment Rate 4 th Quarter After Exit	54.0%	66.9%
Credential Attainment 4 th Quarter After Exit	68.7%	58.0%
Median Earnings 2 nd Quarter After Exit	n/a	\$3,414.77