

CareerSource SW Florida EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY CONSORTIUM QUARTERLY REPORT

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Report quarter: 1st Quarter

Date of meeting: January 22, 2026

Report prepared by: Yolanda Flores

Local workforce development board contact: Peg Elmore **Date:** 1/22/26

B. ATTENDANCE

Name	Organization	Industry or Education	Contact Information
Matt Bredenkamp	Lee County Public Schools	Education	2855 Colonial Blvd, Fort Myers, FL 33966
Angela Tackett	E2 Companies	Industry	8901 Quality Road Bonita Springs, FL 34135
Ariel Pechokas	Collier County Public Schools	Education	3702 Estey Ave. Naples, FL 34104
Kristen Vanselow	Florida Gulf Coast University	Education	10501 FGCU Boulevard South Fort Myers, FL 33965
Jennifer Thayer	Lee Health	Industry	6630 Orion Drive, Suite 101 Fort Myers, FL 33912
Blanca Beauchamp	Conditioned Air	Industry	3786 Mercantile Avenue Naples, FL 34104
Staci Taylor	VI @ Bentley Village	Industry	850 Retreat Dr. Naples, FL 34110

Tatum Walker	Lee County Economic Development	Industry	2201 Second St., Suite 500 Fort Myers, FL 33901
Tori Cunningham	Family Health Center of SW Florida	Industry	2232 Grand Ave. Fort Myers, FL 33901

B. SUMMARY REPORT

A joint meeting with the Education and Industry Consortium, and the Business & Economic Development Committee was held.

The Chair welcomed attendees and facilitated introductions.

**Roles & Responsibilities Discussion
Business & Economic Development (BED) Committee and Education & Industry Consortium**

Peg Elmore provided an overview of both the Business & Economic Development Committee and the Education & Industry Consortium, explaining their similarities and key differences. She noted that the Consortium operates in a less formal capacity, with members serving two-year terms, while the BED Committee functions as a standing committee of the Workforce Development Board and is governed by Sunshine Law requirements.

The Committee reviewed its responsibilities, which include:

- Reviewing workforce needs of major employers and large business expansions
- Identifying gaps within the education and workforce talent pipeline
- Communicating workforce needs and trends to education partners
- Monitoring employer-related strategic plan goals and performance indicators, including:
 - Number of new employers served
 - Repeat business engagement
 - Year-over-year increase in business penetration
- Ensuring compliance with Sunshine Law regulations
- Providing reports and recommendations to the Board of Directors

Education & Industry Consortium

The role of the Education & Industry Consortium was presented, noting that it is mandated under REACH Act 2.0 (SB240). The Consortium serves in an advisory capacity and is designed to foster collaboration between education and industry partners. Members serve two-year terms and are not subject to Sunshine Law requirements, allowing for more open dialogue and collaboration.

Key responsibilities include:

- Advising the Board of Directors
- Aligning education initiatives with business and workforce needs
- Comparing talent pipelines to current and emerging workforce demand

- Providing industry feedback on curriculum and skills requirements
- Meeting quarterly and posting meeting reports publicly
- Can review the Masters Credential list and make recommendations
- Operating outside Sunshine Law regulations

Jobs of the Future / Industry Perspectives

The Committee welcomed representatives from regional industry and education partners, including:

- Shelby Baucom – SWFL STEM Education
- Richard Ching – MID-JET
- Rob Harris – Southwest Regional Manufacturers Association
- Jennifer Thayer – Lee Health

Discussion focused on workforce alignment, emerging occupations, and strengthening partnerships between industry and education.

- Richard Ching (MID-JET) shared current workforce challenges facing the aviation industry, emphasizing that the company's greatest need is recruiting qualified employees. He noted that MID-JET is actively seeking 10 or more technicians to meet current and projected demand. Mr. Ching explained that ideal candidates should possess a combination of foundational knowledge, technical skills, and hands-on experience. Training pathways may include apprenticeships, on-the-job training (OJT), or prior related experience, which is considered a strong advantage. Additional hiring requirements include a high school diploma and the ability to pass a drug screening. He shared that technician positions offer competitive wages, with earning potential ranging from approximately \$80,000 to \$100,000 annually. Mr. Ching also provided background on MID-JET, noting that the company relocated to Southwest Florida approximately 20 years ago and specializes in commercial aviation component-level repairs. He emphasized that the aviation industry continues to experience long-term workforce demand and is consistently seeking skilled talent for the future.
- Rob Harris provided an overview of current trends and workforce needs within the manufacturing sector. He noted that each manufacturer has specialized workforce requirements, making targeted training and skills development essential. Mr. Harris referenced a skills gap analysis conducted several years ago, which identified foundational skills as a primary area of need across the industry. He shared that increased automation, particularly in welding and advanced manufacturing processes, is shaping workforce demands and changing required skill sets. Discussion emphasized the importance of focusing on semiconductor-related training and industry growth within the region. Mr. Harris noted that semiconductor industry expansion is unlikely to occur in Southwest Florida until the appropriate education and training infrastructure is established. Kristen Vanselow with Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) stated that FGCU is willing to collaborate with Valencia State College to explore

opportunities to develop targeted semiconductor programming. It was also noted that Florida SouthWestern State College is currently offering Engineering Technology programs to help support workforce development needs.

Additionally, the Hendry County Economic Development Director shared that efforts are underway in Tallahassee to advocate for funding to support workforce and industry growth initiatives.

Angela provided an overview of workforce needs at E2 Manufacturing Storage. She shared that the company is seeking individuals with a basic technical foundation in electronics to support current operations. Current hiring needs include positions such as electrical assemblers, IT professionals, accounting staff, HVAC technicians, and electrical apprentices. Angela noted that the company is currently located in Bonita Springs and is transitioning into a 50,000-square-foot facility, with long-term plans to expand into a 350,000-square-foot facility to support continued growth.

- Shelby Baucom provided an overview of SWFL STEM Education and its role in supporting STEM learning opportunities for students across Southwest Florida. She explained that the organization focuses on building student interest and skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through hands-on learning, partnerships with industry, and career-connected experiences. Ms. Baucom highlighted the importance of student competitions as a key strategy for increasing engagement and exposing students to real-world applications of STEM. These competitions provide opportunities for students to develop problem-solving, teamwork, and technical skills while connecting with local employers and industry mentors. She noted that STEM competitions across Southwest Florida help strengthen the talent pipeline by encouraging students to pursue careers in high-demand fields, including engineering, manufacturing, technology, and advanced industries. SWFL STEM Education works collaboratively with schools, businesses, and community partners to expand participation and align student experiences with regional workforce needs.
- Jennifer Thayer provided an overview of workforce needs and opportunities within Lee Health. She shared that the healthcare industry continues to experience strong demand for qualified professionals across both clinical and non-clinical roles. Ms. Thayer noted ongoing needs for positions such as nurses, technicians, allied health professionals, and support staff, emphasizing the importance of developing clear education and career pathways to meet workforce demands. She highlighted the value of partnerships with local schools, colleges, and workforce organizations to help build a sustainable healthcare talent pipeline. Discussion also included the importance of exposing students and job seekers to healthcare careers early, expanding training opportunities, and supporting workforce development initiatives that align education programs with industry needs.