

a. The local area has adjusted or provided an addendum to the local plan explaining the planned use of the waiver.

The local plan for Western Arkansas was drafted to allow flexibility for program initiatives and to adapt best practices when options and opportunities are present. The local area will add this addendum to the local plan to further illustrate the intent of our area to provide the most appropriate service delivery to meet the needs of businesses and job seekers in the Western Arkansas region. To expand on the intent of our formal request, we plan to implement a 40/60 expenditure variance for in-school youth vs. out of school youth to best fit the needs of our service area.

b. The waiver request includes a description of the barriers to optimum service to area youth caused by the 75% restriction.

The Western Arkansas workforce development area faces significant challenges related to youth and their preparedness to enter the job market. Many of our local youth are lacking skills necessary to meet in-demand occupation openings and are unsure where to go when preparing for a career once they leave school and no longer have the support of the traditional education system. Responding to the need of in-school youth preparedness has been identified as paramount to curtailing the growth of the out of school youth problem. The requirement to meet 75% funding on out of school youth prevents the region from adequately addressing the problem of reaching at-risk youth before they are lost to the workforce development system. We know there are a number of barriers that attribute to this including foster care, homelessness, justice involvement, isolation due to the rural nature of the region, and a lack of job knowledge and work skills training.

Arkansas is predominantly a rural state, and the Western Arkansas region heavily reflects this. This creates many barriers such as transportation, available childcare, food insecurity, accessible training, or even knowledge of local job opportunities. More importantly, the rural nature of our area presents potential issues with communication and early intervention. It is our intention to connect with our area youth while they are still enrolled in school to help overcome potential barriers before these students move on and become difficult to reach.

Additionally, poverty rates are evidence of the need for aid to connect youth to opportunity before they leave school unprepared for the workplace. The poverty rates of persons under 18 in the six counties making up Western Arkansas are as follows: Crawford 28.1%, Franklin 23.2%, Logan 22.2%, Polk 28.9%, Scott 29.8%, and Sebastian 21.7%. These rates are 5.8% to 10.2% higher than the total poverty rate of the area.

In our region we have the highest population of youth in foster care in the state illustrated in the 2019 Statistical Report from Arkansas Department of Human Services. Pulled from information provided by the Division of Children and Family Services, the report stated that our service area represented a total of 1,320 foster children with 834 of those residing within Sebastian County. DCFS has ten foster care service areas throughout the state, and the Western Arkansas region represents over 17% of the children served. Homelessness is also a concern brought on by a lack of preparedness for the job market or inability to maintain sustainable employment. According to adadata.arkansas.gov, "Homeless by Type" there are nearly 1040 youth homeless in this region. As youth age out of foster care, they face a real possibility of becoming part of this statistic according to representatives of a local youth crisis center.

c. The waiver request describes how the waiver will increase the number of in-school youth serviced and the overall performance indicators.

A key focus of our efforts in developing opportunities with in-school youth is to provide quality work experience while they are still in high school. Most schools do not have the programing or business outreach personnel to connect students to work experience in areas they may have interest in. This disconnect may be due to distance to work sites, a lack of matching services or counseling to connect business owners to interested students. Additionally, they may lack sufficient, properly trained professionals to provide case management and coaching to youth to help them succeed in pursuing a career in a demand field. By working with in-school youth and the school staff we will connect them to real work experiences as their teachers provide basic knowledge, they can apply in these work experiences. We have strong working relationships with a majority of our area high schools and by allowing us this variance we can extend this valuable service to all of our area schools. We also have great working relationships with the colleges and university in our region.

Our region hosts one of the civilian conservation centers that serve youth at Cass. The Cass Job Corps center is a partner in the region's workforce delivery system, providing training to youth in a number of demand trades but has opportunities to work with other agencies to connect their youth to businesses willing to provide work experiences. The center has an average of 100 youth in the program year-round.

d. The waiver request details how services to area youth will improve because of the waiver.

The system of Western Arkansas has taken the approach that quality work experience and supportive case management will improve the successful and sustainable employment of youth in the region. The local area also has success stories illustrating how work experience can support high school completion of at-risk youth further reinforcing the need for the variance allowing Western Arkansas to utilize youth funds in support of a higher percentage of in-school youth. Our hope is that by assisting youth that can be reached this way, more out of school youth will also learn and participate in our programs. Our program will increase the percent of work experience spending of youth funds providing greater immersion in actual work activities and connecting youth to mentors on the job sites. As stated, high school completion by at-risk youth can be reinforced through positive adult interactions. It is also anticipated that this will create more sustainable employment of youth entering the workforce through job preparedness and experience.

e. The waiver request describes how required performance indicators will increase as a result of the waiver.

With the variance allowed under this waiver, the local area sees the potential for increases to youth performance indicators in the following categories: Credential Attainment, Work Experience, Cost Efficiency, and Employer Engagement. With the ability to engage youth while still in school, the local area can foster relationships that will provide mentorship and meaning. With the potential of additional work experiences for in-school youth, this will allow for workplace mentors, and the development of strong work ethics. With positive mentorship and a determination to work on projects towards completion, we believe that we will see an up-tick in credential attainment for those that go through our programs. With a circle of support, students will be encouraged to meet their educational goals. Employer engagement will fall in line with these goals as skilled youth will provide new workers to fill needs in local demand occupations providing a bridge from student to employee.

f. The waiver request specifies the requested minimum rate of Youth funds to be spent for services to OSY for PY19 and PY20 funds.

This is a request for utilization of the variance granted to the state of Arkansas related to the expenditure of funds on in-school versus out of school youth for the PY20 funding cycle. The Western Arkansas workforce development area expects that the use of this variance allocating 60% to out of school and 40% of funds to in-school youth. This aids the program in creating positive outcomes in high school completion by at-risk youth, better job retention, and improved knowledge of skills and traits needed to obtain and fill demand job opportunities in the region. This variance will also allow business outreach efforts to provide fresh pathways for local companies to fill positions now and in the future as the outreach team helps them establish positive relationships with area schools and vis a versa.