2025–2026 Greater Cincinnati Business Advisory Council Joint Statement

Name of Business Advisory Council (BAC):

Greater Cincinnati Business Advisory Council (GCBAC)

Primary Contact: Donna Lauver, Chair, Hamilton County ESC

Secondary Contact: Chad Hilliker, Superintendent, Hamilton County ESC

Overview of Fulfillment of Responsibilities

Pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Section 3313.82, the Greater Cincinnati Business Advisory Council (GCBAC), in collaboration with participating school districts and educational service centers Hamilton, Clermont, and Butler counties, has fulfilled its statutory responsibilities by:

- Establishing and expanding strategic partnerships between education and industry
- Supporting career-based learning experiences aligned to regional workforce needs
- Providing professional skill development opportunities for students
- Strengthening alignment between K–12 education pathways and in-demand careers
- Expanding access to business advisory council engagement across 40 school districts

The GCBAC continues to operate as a regional model, integrating career connectors, employer partnerships, and the LinkedUp Connect platform to ensure coordinated, equitable access to workforce experiences for all students.

Changes in Structure or Leadership

*There have been **no significant structural changes** to the governance model of the GCBAC during the 2025–2026 school year.*

The current leadership represents members of educational, industry, and non-profit leadership from the Greater Cincinnati Region. Additionally, to support the regional aspects of the council, the executive team also encompasses individuals from all three counties of the GCBAC.

The council continues to operate under a regional framework led by Chair Donna Lauver through Hamilton County ESC, President Corinne Hayes, Assistant Superintendent of Southwest Local Schools, and President-Elect, Mark Edwards, Assistant Superintendent of Reading Community Schools. The number of active business partners and participating districts has continued to grow, strengthening the regional model rather than altering its structure.

Progress Toward 2025–2026 Goals

On a scale of 1–10, the GCBAC rates overall goal completion at this point 7/10

Substantial progress has been made in all strategic areas, with continued growth and activities scheduled in the upcoming months. Our regional symposium, pre-apprenticeship training, curriculum development finalization, and transportation funding model are on the docket for upcoming months.

Goals Accomplished

To date, the GCBAC has successfully accomplished:

1. Expanded Career-Based Learning Opportunities

- Increased student participation in Experienceships, job shadowing, internships, industry tours, and career speaker events (focus on Business, Finance, Marketing)
- Continued implementation and expansion of the LinkedUp Connect regional platform. This platform is embedded in 38 school districts and serving over 12,000 students
- Maintained participation across 40 school districts

2. Strengthened Employer Engagement

- Sustained partnerships with over 200 regional businesses
- Increased employer-hosted student experiences
- Deepened employer participation in pathway alignment discussions

3. Supported Career Connector Network

- Continued coordination of 44 career connectors across participating districts
- Provided professional learning and regional collaboration sessions
- Standardized processes for employer engagement and experience documentation

4. Developed Workforce-Aligned Academic Innovation

- Advanced planning toward the development of an Algebra II equivalent course focused on applied, construction-based mathematics.
- Engaged industry partners in identifying real-world mathematical competencies required in skilled trades and construction pathways.
- Cross-sector conversations began with curriculum leaders and business partners to align academic rigor with hands-on application.
- Established the Work-Ready Credential for member districts in all 16 state identified career clusters with a reduced cost of $35.00
- Completed the AI support to finalize the second credential application.

5. Increased Equity and Access

- Ensured that workforce-based learning opportunities were accessible to students across urban, suburban, and rural districts. This is consistent with the work within our LinkedUp Connect portal that is not associated with a cost to any of our districts but also not dependent upon the programs such as School Links, Power School, Portfolio etc. We are providing access to all students in all schools.
- Prioritized experiences for underrepresented student populations

Challenges Experienced

While substantial progress has been made, the GCBAC encountered the following challenges:

1. **Scheduling Constraints** – Aligning school calendars with employer availability continues to require coordination to allow our GCBAC subcommittees to work together regularly and in collaboration with each other.
2. **Transportation Barriers** – Access to off-site experiences remains a logistical challenge for some districts.
3. **Employer Capacity** – Some businesses face staffing shortages that limit their ability to host students consistently.
4. **Sustainable Funding** – As ESSER-related funding diminishes, identifying long-term sustainability structures remains a priority. The GCBAC does not receive funding from the state or any private grant dollars to supply the support, administrative costs, leadership development associated with the work.

The council is actively addressing these challenges through regional coordination, shared resources, and expanded virtual engagement options.

New Partnerships Formed (2025–2026)

During this academic year, the GCBAC added new partnerships across key industry sectors including:

- **Construction and skilled trades organizations**
  - Cincinnati Toolbank, Tools Foundation, CINFAB, IEC, Messer Construction
- **Regional healthcare providers**
  - Talbert House, Great Oaks Career Campuses (CCMA & CNA Trainings), UC Health, NKU (Heartsavers Field Trip), BioPathways from Ohio Life Sciences, The Health Collaborative
- **Advanced manufacturing employers**
  - Miami University College of Engineering & Computing, Cincinnati Incorporated AtriCure & BioPathways from Ohio Life Sciences
- **Small business and entrepreneurial networks**
  - Warrior Boxing Club, Visuro Consulting
- **Postsecondary institutions supporting workforce credentials**
  - Cincinnati State

These new partnerships have expanded student access to high-demand career pathways and strengthened alignment with regional workforce needs.

Changes to 2025–2026 Goals

The GCBAC has not removed any previously established goals.

However, the following strategic enhancement was added during implementation:

- **Development of an Algebra II equivalent, construction-focused mathematics course** designed to integrate applied mathematical competencies aligned with industry standards and real-world workforce expectations.

This enhancement reflects direct employer feedback and supports Ohio's graduation pathway flexibility while maintaining academic rigor.

Media Coverage and Case Studies

During the 2025–2026 school year, the GCBAC and LinkedUp Connect initiative have:

- Been highlighted in regional workforce development (Clermont/Hamilton counties)
- Participated in state-level conversations regarding innovative Business Advisory Council models (December 2025),
- Spotlight Speaker for building partnerships- ODEW- February 2025
- Chair Donna Lauver, Panelist with Greater Cincinnati Chamber seminar
- Spotlight Article with Springfield, Missouri, Donna Lauver
- Served as a regional example of coordinated ESC-led workforce partnership alignment
- Contributed data and implementation insights to state-level workforce discussions
- Awarded focus funding with CPSN grant work 2026

Conclusion

The Greater Cincinnati Business Advisory Council continues to demonstrate strong alignment with the intent of Ohio Revised Code 3313.82 by:

- Building sustainable partnerships between education and industry
- Expanding equitable access to career-based learning
- Strengthening regional workforce alignment
- Innovating academic pathways tied to real-world application

Through collaborative leadership, employer engagement, and a coordinated regional model, the GCBAC remains committed to preparing students across Hamilton, Clermont, and Butler counties for high-demand, high-skill, and high-wage careers.