

**Illinois Eastern Community Colleges**  
**Strategic Engagement Planning Council (SEPC) Minutes**  
**August 6, 2025 | 2:00–4:30 p.m. | TLB West Richland Center**

**Attendees:** Ryan Gower, Sheryl Childers, Tona Ambrose, Matt Fowler, Ryan Hawkins, Sharmila Kakac, Amber Malone, Jessica McDonald, Andrea McDowell, Cathy Robb, Chris Simpson, Brandon Weger

**Absent:** Paul Tait

**Guests:** Amy Tarr, Robert Conn, Casandra Goldman, Cyndi Boyce, Alani Frederick

**Welcome & Opening Remarks**

Dr. Gower opened the meeting with a welcome for the new school year. He provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda. He complemented the recent building upgrades at the Terry L. Bruce West Richland Center, Wabash Valley College, and Olney Central College. He announced that the bid opening for the athletic facility at Frontier came in on budget, and anticipates presenting the bid recommendation to the Board this month. He gave an overview of the topics explored at the IECC Board Retreat and indicated it gave him good direction for his activities for the year. He reported that enrollment for Fall 2025 looks positive, although it is difficult to know if this is early gains due to process change or genuine growth. He reminded the group of the operational context that has led IECC to this point in time, and expressed confidence in the leadership team's ability to lead their divisions confidently this year. He asked for feedback on the proposed addendum to the strategic plan that he shared in July. This was the last opportunity for feedback before it was submitted for publication.

**Reports**

- **Institutional effectiveness (Weger):** Mr. Weger gave an overview of data that reflects the average earnings for IECC graduates.
- **FCC/B&I (Kakac):** Dr. Kakac reported on recent events happening in Business & Industry and updated the council on collaborations with Wabash General Hospital. FCC is completing beautification projects on campus before the start of AY26. The Terry L. Bruce West Richland Center has received a grant from a local granting agency to assist with parking lot repairs.
- **Finance (Hawkins):** Mr. Hawkins discussed the customer service inquiry screen in Banner and the importance of having the information accessible to the front offices at each campus, financial aid, and advising staff. Financial aid is carefully monitoring new legislation that could affect funding for Pell Grants. He gave an overview of authorized financial aid funding.

- **HR (McDowell):** Mrs. McDowell reported on pay sheet operation meetings and commended the growth from those meetings. She also thanked those who recently participated in a recent CBA training with legal counsel.
- **Faculty (McDonald):** Mrs. McDonald reported on the feedback from a communication that went out to faculty regarding eCampus and she requested quick reference postcards for the faculty. Pointing to an OCC absence in Marketing and Communication, she encouraged ensuring that all staff are aware of extended employee absences on campus and asked that communication be sent to new faculty members for setting up classes in Entrata and outlining the resources IECC offers to students in need. She reported the perception that one campus/facility was receiving a disproportionate amount of work study students. Mr. Hawkins disseminated data in the meeting to correct this perception.
- **Academic Affairs (Robb):** AALT is reviewing the faculty handbook. Dr. Robb reported on a recent meeting with the athletic coaches at LTC and informed the council of an upcoming meeting with WVC coaches. AALT is working on enhancing pathways and the next steps of faculty involvement in the process. Dr. Robb is working with IT to develop a dashboard for the Deans, and she gave an overview of a new Canvas tool that will help understand student engagement in that environment.
- **OAR (Malone)-** Mrs. Malone reported that the Common Application is complete. The OAR team is working to prepare communication for area high schools and their students.
- **LTC/IOLT (Ambrose):** President Ambrose reported strong participation and growth within the PACE workshops she has had with local high schools. She provided a flyer of Community Education courses that are being offered across IECC campuses and reported on the positive feedback from the community. Dual Credit is sending out postcards to potential students and conducting pre-registration events in the local community. All Model Partnership Agreements have been signed, returned, and are in place for the next 2 academic years.
- **WVC/SALT (Fowler)-** Dr. Fowler reported on maintenance projects happening at WVC in preparation for the first day of classes. He reported on the progress of the new athletic facility at WVC. For the upcoming year, he is exploring how advising can best be structured and delivered in the Guided Pathways model. He praised the work of Cassandra Goldman with housing, and encouraged the council to reach out to her with any housing questions. Housing affiliation agreements have been signed with all landlords, and pre-move in inspections have been done or will soon be in all locations where IECC students will live. SALT is working towards ESL accredited online programs. This will allow international students who are still waiting on Visas to not be delayed in starting their education. Dean Goldman reported on mental health training that is being offered to athletic coaches.

- **OCC/BOLT (Simpson)-** President Simpson reported that the flooring projects at OCC theater foyer are complete and he discussed the options for furnishing the OCC Technology Center. The eCampus bookstore has launched with some minor challenges that were raised and resolved. He asked for continued communication as to places where problems have been experienced so his team can address them. He discussed a recent review of food services at IECC, shared a plan for WVC this year, and announced the formation of a planning committee that will bring a formal recommendation on how food services can be delivered at each of the four campuses.

### **Consent Agenda – Approved**

- July SEPC minutes
- Divisional minutes
- PREVAIL Illinois MOU (Fowler)
- SAFE MOU (Fowler)
- LTC Foundation MOU (Gower)
- Affiliation Agreements (Robb)
  - Stone Bridge Memory Care
  - Stone Bridge Senior Living
  - Ferrell Hospital
  - The Carle Foundation
  - WLC Management
  - Axiom Healthcare of Flora
- Grant Update (Hawkins)

*No items were removed from the Consent Agenda.*

**Policies & Procedures-** None

### **Staff Recommendations for Approval**

- **Equity in Athletics / Salary for Club Sports (Hawkins)-** Mr. Hawkins sought approval for providing base funding for the coaching staff of WVC Archery and Bass clubs. The support provided will align with the existing structure established for coaching personnel in all other NJCAA sports. The item was tabled for further discussion.
- **Equity in Athletics / Update General Administration - College Amount (Hawkins)-** Mr. Hawkins sought approval to increase the Athletic Administrative budget at each campus. The increase will ensure consistency and adequacy in funding, better reflect the actual operational needs identified by Presidents and their athletic staff, and reduce the financial burden on each athletic department. SEPC approval was given.
- **Tiered Acceptance for Nursing (Robb)-** Dr. Robb requested approval to operate a pilot test of the project in Summer 2026. The goal is to increase enrollment and improve retention by offering a summer workshop for students that are within 15% of the TEAS score. These students would have otherwise been denied

admission. This strategy is student centered, aims to address workforce shortages, and assist in enrollment deficits in the nursing program. SEPC approval was given.

- **IECC/VU Articulation for Surgical Technology (Robb)**- Approval was given for the 1+1 agreement that provides framework for transfer credits earned at IECC to count towards the Associate of Surgical Technology Career degree at Vincennes University. SEPC approval was given.
- **EMR/EMT Certificates (Kakac)**- An update to the title of the certificate was requested and approved.
- **Program Review 2025 (Robb)**- The 2025 Program Review document was reviewed and approved. Dr. Gower and Dr. Robb thanked the team who assembled the 500 page document.

### **Informational & Discussion Items**

- **Continuation of All IECC After Board Meeting (Gower)**- The council discussed the continuation of the After Board update meeting that is held after each monthly Board of Trustees meeting. The meetings are well attended by staff and will continue for the Fall 2025 term.
- **Federal Work Study Hours / New Students (Gower/Fowler)**- IECC has imposed new limitations for work study hours for first-year due to uncertainty in federal funding. New students are limited to 10 hours of work study until the uncertainty around funding is diminished. Returning students will not be affected by the limitation.
- **IECC Application Process / Committee Communication (Gower/Fowler)**- Dr. Fowler inquired about the Human Resource requirements for pre-interview documents. It is mandated by law that all applicants complete the application and addendum prior to interviewing. HR indicated a willingness to clarify the process further with revisions to Procedure 400.1.1 and will bring this procedure to September SEPC for consideration.
- **Workforce PELL (Hawkins)**- Mr. Hawkins would like to form a committee to work on the implementation of workforce Pell funds. He asked that volunteers reach out to him directly.
- **Data Inquiries (Gower)**- Dr. Gower announced that at his request, the CIO will soon be introducing a revised helpdesk ticket for data requests. IECC is working to improve its data, and in order to do that we need to have a firm understanding of what data is necessary, how that data is defined, who needs that data and when that data is needed. This is the first step toward building a data-informed culture with automated reports and dashboards. Right now, the data team receives various data requests – or data request are directed to Brandon Weger – without any context. For the near future, all data requests will need to funnel first through division leadership (VC) for discussion/vetting and then submitted using this ticketing system. More information will be shared in September.
- **Cybersecurity Training (Gower)**- IT has reported low completion rates for the mandated employee cybersecurity training. Supervisors were asked to remind employees to complete the training, prior to other action being taken. Updates on completion of division employees will be brought to the September SEPC meeting.

- **IECC Surveys (Weger)**- Mr. Weger has asked for feedback on the surveys currently being conducted at IECC and asked SEPC to inform him of the most valuable data collected from them. He anticipates bringing an approval item on surveys to the September SEPC meeting.
- **Walk in Wednesdays (Ambrose)**- The event has been a success and data shows that the events have contributed to increase conversion and yield rates.

### Capital Projects

- **Update WVC Athletics (Hawkins)-Tabled**
- **Update LTC Technology Center (Hawkins)-Tabled**
- **Update OCC Technology Center (Hawkins)-Tabled**
- **Update FCC Bid Opening (Hawkins)-Tabled**

### District Finance

Mr. Hawkins announced that tuition revenue received to this point supported the fact that registration, enrollment, and bill payments were all ahead of pace for this year. This is a positive indicator for Fall enrollment.

### Approval of Personnel Items:

- **Paramedic Program Medical Director (McDowell/Kakac)**- Approval was given to hire the director for this program in compliance with the MOU approved by the Board of Trustees last spring.
- **Special Assignment WVC Athletic Director (McDowell)**- Seeking permission to bring a special assignment for Aaron Biddle.
- **Change in Status Technology Systems Specialists (McDowell/Tait)**- A change in status will be recommended for two IT staff members who have absorbed duties previously held by Paul Tait prior to his appointment as CIO. Mr. Tait's previous position will not be backfilled.
- **Change in Status Coordinator of Public Information & Marketing (McDowell)**- A change in status for Chris Forde is recommended reflecting the permanent adoption of the role/structure used in MarCom for the last three years. The model has proven to be effective.
- **Change in Status HR Office Assistant (McDowell)**- Permission was given to move a current PT staff to FT, specifically to assist in implementation of new payroll software in the near future.

**Other Business-** Dr. Fowler asked for approval to revise job responsibilities for an academic advisor at Wabash Valley College. This individual is currently employed as a 100% academic advisor and receives a stipend to serve as the women's soccer coach. Dr. Fowler reported that the coaching duties necessitated time out of the office during times he should be meeting with students. To better reflect actual work performed, Dr. Fowler recommended a 75/25% split allowing this advisor to leave the office at 2:30 for coaching activities. SEPC approval was given for a temporary trial with the

understanding that the salary would be expensed to student affairs and athletics in that same proportion. SEPC will revisit this arrangement in December.

Dr. Gower reminded the Vice Chancellor's of the October 10, 2025 professional development day listed on the Academic Calendar. Each division will hold their annual retreat on this day. Topics will vary by division and may include strategy sessions, operational overview, or professional development.

The new arrangement for AY26 Townhall meetings was presented. Information about these communication opportunities will be announced in the All IECC meeting, updated on the website, and communicated electronically before each meeting.

**Adjournment:** 5: 28 p.m.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, September 3, 2025 | 2:00 p.m. | TLB WRC