

Illinois Eastern Community Colleges
Strategic Engagement Planning Council (SEPC) Minutes
February 4, 2026 | 9:00 - 11:30 a.m. | TLB West Richland Center

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

Absent: Andrea McDowell, Cathy Robb, Paul Tait

Guests: Chris Forde

Welcome & Opening Remarks

Dr. Gower called the meeting to order and provided an overview of the agenda. He reminded campus Presidents that a shared folder has been established for CEMT minutes; to date, only two campuses have uploaded their materials. Using a recent maintenance issue at one campus as an example, Dr. Gower emphasized that under IECC's updated organizational structure, campus leadership has an increased responsibility to communicate with colleagues and peers across the District to keep them informed of significant local issues—particularly those that may affect faculty, students, or staff with reporting lines in different divisions.

Emergency Plans Presentation

Chris Forde provided an update on ongoing emergency planning efforts. The committee's (Chris Forde, Sonja Holtz, Amber Malone, Jessica McDonald and Ken Prior) work has focused on developing a consistent, districtwide framework and supporting documents to be implemented across all IECC locations. He highlighted the Hazards Response Plan and the Emergency Response Quick Action Checklist as key components of this effort.

SEPC members were asked to provide feedback in advance of the documents returning to SEPC in March. A recommendation was made to incorporate additional resources related to mental health crisis response. The documents will be revised accordingly and, upon final approval, implemented at each campus to ensure consistency across the District.

Reports

Institutional Effectiveness. Brandon Weger gave an update on Fall to Spring retention rates for full-time and part-time students. 1,313 of 1,547 (84.57%) degree and certificate seeking students returned from Fall '25 to the Spring '26 semester. The First-time

Freshmen retention rate was 85.9%, with 87.42% of full-time Freshmen and 74.03% of part-time Freshmen returning.

Consent Agenda

Approved items included:

- **January 2026 SEPC minute and Divisional Minutes**
- **Grant Update (Hawkins)**

Consent Agenda approved unanimously.

Policies & Procedures

Reviewed for administrative action:

- **Procedure 300.23 IECC Issued Credit Cards (Hawkins)**- Revisions were made to the procedure to reflect the updated process for requesting and issuing personalized and general use credit cards. SEPC Approval was given.
- **Policy 400.4 Holiday Leave and Benefit (McDowell)**- Revisions were made to the policy to reflect recent statutory changes and to improve clarity and consistency from a business procedure to an HR procedure. The policy was tabled and will be revisited.
- **Procedure 300.17 Facilities Usage (Simpson)**- The item returned for final approval following the feedback provided at the January SEPC meeting. The procedure outlines the process for usage of campus facilities by outside entities. Item was tabled and will be returned in March.

Staff Recommendations for Approval

- None.

Informational & Discussion Items

- **IECC FY26 Budget (Hawkins)**- Budget workbooks will be available in mid-February. The VC's will be tasked with completing and returning the books by late March for inclusion in the final FY27 budget.
- **Hazards Response (Gower/Forde)**- A copy of the document was shared with the council. It provides information for responding to an immediate danger such as active threat/shooter, bomb/suspicious package, fire, hazardous materials, medical emergencies, natural disasters, mental health crisis, shelter in place, and utility emergencies. Dr. Gower asked Presidents to review with their CEMT to solicit feedback prior to March SEPC.

- **Emergency Response Quick Action Checklist (Gower/Forde)**- A copy of the document was shared with the council that serves as a guide for immediate action in emergency situations. Dr. Gower asked Presidents to review with their CEMT to solicit feedback prior to March SEPC.
- **Equity in IECC Athletics - Payroll (Presidents)**- The Presidents introduced a proposal for the equitable employment and compensation of full-time and part-time intercollegiate athletics employees. Dr. Gower requested a full-day CEO/Presidents group meeting to be scheduled for early March to discuss the proposal, as well as other athletic issues that have come to the surface in recent meetings.
- **2027-2029 Academic Calendar (Malone/McDowell)**- A copy of the drafted calendar was reviewed and feedback was given. The document will be returned for final approval in March.
- **Procedure 100.24 Emergency Management (Gower)**- Dr. Gower shared a draft of the newly developed procedure for review. The document is intended to establish a coordinated emergency management framework designed to protect the health, safety, and welfare of students, employees, and visitors across the District.

Dr. Gower will work with Chris Forde and the ad hoc committee to further refine and strengthen the procedure. The revised draft will return to SEPC in March for first reading.

Capital Projects: None.

District Finance: None.

Approval of Personnel Items

- None.

Other Business- None.

Adjournment: 11:59 a.m.

Next Meeting: March 4, 2026 @ 9 am