

**Illinois Eastern Community Colleges**  
**Strategic Engagement Planning Council (SEPC) Minutes**  
**September 3, 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, Paul Tait, Brandon Weger

**Absent:** None.

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

**Welcome & Opening Remarks**

Dr. Gower opened the meeting and provided a brief overview of the meeting agenda. He asked the leadership team to think strategically about the monthly IECC newsletter and to take the time to share information with Jessica McDonald in which the IECC community would have interest. He reminded the VC's that any items pertaining to policy and procedure, or items that affect verbiage in the catalog, should be passed through Lori Barger prior to making their way to division meetings for consideration or approval. He gave a quick overview of the information he received from the Presidents for athletic spending and noted that enrollment targets were missed in 10 different sports. He gave an update on the recent special meeting of the IECC Board of Trustees related to employment matters and collective bargaining.

**Reports**

- **IT (Tait):** Mr. Tait mentioned that some faculty have requested to move courses to distance learning when they are not on the schedule for that modality. He is working with Dr. Robb to address this issue. Microsoft Office has been renewed for the next year.
- **FCC/B&I (Kakac):** Dr. Kakac reported that B&I is working on a grant writing workshop to be held at LTC. Parking lot repairs have been completed at the TLB WRC thanks to a local grant.
- **Finance (Hawkins):** Mr. Hawkins reported that a total of 51 work-study students have been placed throughout the District for Fall 2025 with 16 students at WVC, 10 students at OCC, 18 students at LTC and 7 students at FCC. Pell has authorized 1.8 million dollars in funding as of today, that amount is an increase compared to Fall 24.
- **Faculty (McDonald):** Mrs. McDonald reported on questions regarding the WVC food services. She requested communication to the faculty outlining the best point of contact for specific topics following organizational chart and job

description updates. Mrs. McDonald, Mrs. McDowell, and Dr. Gower will connect to form a plan for providing the information. She shared concerns from the faculty regarding the Spring schedule for F2F classes vs. online courses. She reported on shipping issues with ecampus for books that are not being ordered until the start of the semester. Dr. Gower asked Dr. Robb to delegate a member of her team for composing a communication to the faculty outlining the best path for reporting ecampus issues. She inquired about data collection for student success rate in synchronous learning classrooms.

- **Academic Affairs (Robb):** Dr. Robb reported on sport classes and thanked Dean Conn for his assistance in developing schedules. The Deans have an upcoming retreat to discuss Spring sport classes. Dr. Frederick reported that IECC has earned a 98% pass rate district-wide in Health Professions. Dr. Gower noted that this is a dramatic improvement over scores just a few years ago and is a testament to the pedagogical and student support measures adopted by nursing faculty.
- **OAR (Malone)-** Mrs. Malone reported that the OAR has received a Letter of Intent for the Common App. The letter indicates IECC's intent to begin utilizing the application. IECC will begin the onboarding process with Common App.
- **LTC/IOLT (Ambrose):** President Ambrose reported on Dual Credit and acknowledged the efforts of her team and representatives from Student Affairs in getting registrations entered prior to 10-day. LTC's women's soccer team includes 16 international students. She reminded SEPC that town hall meetings are being combined and the next meeting for all Divisions is on 9/25 at LTC. She reported on Enrollment at IECC, at present, IECC has 30,310 total credit hours in the system. This is a 1.2% increase from Fall 24. Mr. Weger reported that IECC received 2,128 applications for degree or certificate programs for Summer and Fall 2025 and 914 of these students have enrolled. These are preliminary numbers only, and the Day-10 count remains the census date and will serve as the official count. An official report will be generated at that time.
- **WVC/SALT (Fowler)-** Dr. Fowler reported that the SALT meeting was delayed accommodating the first day of the Fall semester and apologized for the delay in receiving SALT minutes. In response to a request from Jessica McDonald last month, he provided a document outlining core student support services and where these services can be accessed.
- **OCC/BOLT (Simpson)-** President Simpson reported that the BOLT meeting was also delayed accommodating the first day of the semester and apologized for delayed minutes. The team is working on addressing minor issues and concerns with ecampus to ensure a smoother Spring semester. The food services committee is meeting and discussing all IECC food services and evaluating areas for improvements.

**Consent Agenda** – Dr. Fowler requested two items be removed from the consent agenda for further discussion. The following items were approved as part of the consent agenda:

- **August SEPC minutes**
- **Divisional minutes**
- **IECC Emergency Response Plans & Guides (Fowler)**- The annually updated plans provide guidelines for specific catastrophic scenarios and in conjunction with IECC policies, the Violence Prevention Plan and established emergency procedures. These plans will be presented to the IECC Board of Trustees for acceptance in the September meeting.
- **2025 Annual Security Report (Fowler)**- The annual report is prepared in compliance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act. The annual report will be presented to the IECC Board of Trustees for acceptance in the September meeting
- **Deletion of 600.1 Relationship with College Foundation/ Replace with 100.41 (Gower)**- The policy was deleted and will be replaced by Policy 100.41 Board of Trustees and Foundations Collaboration. Proposed Policy 100.41 will have a first reading and possible approval at the September IECC Board of Trustees meeting.
- **Grant Update (Hawkins)**- The monthly update was reviewed.

*Moved for further discussion*

- **2025 IECC Violence Prevention Plan (Fowler)**- The annually updated plan addresses the prevention and management of incidents of violence and outlines prevention strategies, threat assessment, the reporting process, and interventions.
- **Policy 100.28 Weapons & Concealed Firearms (Gower)**- The policy was updated to reflect the deletion of the IECC Gunsmithing program. Dr. Fowler shared concerns about off-duty police at IECC athletic events. The item will be explored further and revisited. This Policy was approved by SEPC, and may proceed to the IECC Board for first reading and possible approval in September. The item may return to SEPC with revisions next month.

### **Policies & Procedures**

- **Procedure 400.1.1 Selection of Personnel (McDowell)**- Revisions were made to include required training (of Selection Committee members) and for clarification of the process and scope of authority of the search committee. SEPC approval was given. Post meeting a recommendation was made to change the use of "selection committee" to "search committee." Notification of this change was provided to SEPC.
- **Policy 400.22 Salary Basis (McDowell)**- Revisions were made to provide for more general language, removing specifics that lead to an outdated policy or more frequent revisions. The commitment to adhere to the requirements of the FLSA remains the same. SEPC approval was given and the Policy will go to the IECC Board for first reading and possible approval.

- **Policy 400.13 Wages (McDowell)**- The revised policy outlines the process for establishing and approving wages for IECC employees, distinguishing between faculty and non-faculty employees and affirms the at-will employment status of non-bargaining unit employees. SEPC approval was given, and the Policy will go to the IECC Board for first reading and possible approval.
- **Procedure 400.13.2 Annual Wage Approval and Employment Continuation (McDowell)**- The newly developed procedure provides guidelines for the annual approval of wages and continuation of at-will employment for all full-time non-bargaining unit employees. SEPC approval was given.
- **Policy 100.41 Board of Trustees & Foundation Collaboration (Gower)**- Following the recommendation to delete Policy 600.1, SEPC approval for the creation of a new Policy delineating the distinct roles and responsibilities of the IECC Board of Trustees and the foundations as presented. SEPC approval was given and the Policy will go to the IECC Board of Trustees for first reading and possible approval.

#### **Staff Recommendations for Approval**

- **Equity in Athletics Salary Club Sports (Hawkins)**- Mr. Hawkins returned the item to the agenda and inquired if any progress had been made on the topic. The Presidents had not yet reviewed this item and asked that it be returned to SEPC in October following the October President's Meeting. Item tabled.
- **OCC Men's & Women's Soccer Implementation Plan (Simpson)**- President Simpson provided a copy of an implementation plan developed to aide in the internal planning process, key actions that will require Board of Trustees consideration, and as a tool for communicating the deliberate timeline and financial resources necessary for successfully launching the soccer program. SEPC approval was given.
- **Aggregate Mining Certificate (Kakac)**- President Kakac provided a proposal for a tiered system of mining certifications. The certifications can stand alone or be combined and added with general education courses to earn an associate's degree. SEPC approval was given.
- **IECC Survey Administration Proposal (Weger)**- Mr. Weger submitted a proposal to streamline and centrally manage survey administration for instruments that align to IECC's institutional priorities and the strategic engagement plan while preserving flexibility for program-level surveys.  
Dr. Gower asked SEPC to share all existing division/program of study surveys with Mr. Weger following today's meeting for inclusion in a comprehensive document.
- **OCC Sale of Property/ Parker St. (Gower)**- Dr. Gower discussed a subdivision of the property located at OCC and the listing of that property for purchase with a deed restriction limiting property use for OCC student housing. SEPC approval was given and this item will be presented at the IECC Board of Trustees meeting.
- **Next Steps in Building Our Data Foundation (Gower)**- Dr. Gower discussed the rationale for developing a more uniform plan for data requests. Mr. Tait provided information for the newly developed ticketing system and shared a copy of the form to be used when making a data request. For the time being, data requests are limited to SEPC membership. SEPC approval was given.

## Informational & Discussion Items

- **Communication Resources (Gower)**- Dr. Gower reiterated the importance of leadership engaging in and soliciting good communication. He directed SEPC to review his article in the August newsletter that outlined several key sources and to assist in making these resources known to their staff.
- **AY26 Athletic Scholarship Reports**- Dr. Gower thanked the Presidents for their submission of information related to athletic rosters and sport balances. He will review and compile a comprehensive report that will be shared with the IECC Board of Trustees in September.
- **IECC Learning Commons (Fowler)** – Dr. Fowler expressed concern about a mindset he had observed in some Learning Commons where, in the absence of routine staff coverage, the default response was simply to close the space. To address this, he presented a plan for operating the Learning Commons on all four campuses when staff are unavailable. The plan included the names and contact information of team members who volunteered to provide short-term coverage when an employee is absent, at lunch, or temporarily away, with the goal of keeping the Learning Commons open and accessible.
- **Organizational Chart Updates (Ambrose/McDowell)**- President Ambrose shared questions she received regarding locating the organizational charts and deciding who the proper person is to contact for certain topics. Andrea McDowell suggested that leadership educate/assist team members, the information will be given in town hall meetings as well.
- **Adult Ed PT Positions/ Career & Resource Support, Data Entry, Tech Support (Ambrose)**- President Ambrose provided a copy of the job description for discussion. The data entry and tech support position would be responsible for accurate and timely data entry, maintenance, and reporting within the college systems. The career and resource position would be responsible for providing guidance for career pathways and wrap-around services. These are grant funded positions.
- **FT and PT Coaches Non-exempt/ Exempt (McDowell)**- Mrs. McDowell would like to put together a proposal for moving the positions from non-exempt to exempt and asked for feedback from the council. She will follow up with the Presidents to discuss further planning.
- **Cybersecurity Update (Tait)**- Mr. Tait provided a list of employees who have not completed the mandated security training. Supervisors were asked to contact individual employees in their areas to encourage their completion of the training. The item will be revisited, and further action will be taken if training continues to be incomplete.
- **Constitution Day- IECC Events (Robb)**- Dr. Robb provided a copy of the activities at each campus in celebration of Constitution Day, to be held on Wednesday, September 17, 2025.
- **Naming Rights LTC Process Technology Lab (Gower)**- Dr. Gower congratulated President Ambrose on securing a large contribution from Marathon Petroleum for the LTC Technology Center and informed SEPC that a naming rights recommendation would be presented to the IECC Board.
- **Naming Rights FCC Athletic Floor (Gower)**- Dr. Gower congratulated President Kakac on securing a generous contribution from a local benefactor to assist in

the construction of the FCC athletic facility. Dr. Gower will present a naming rights recommendation to the IECC Board to recognize this donation.

- **OCC Ribbon Cutting (Simpson)**- Tentatively speaking an open house for the OCC Applied Technology Center will be held on November 18, 2025.
- **LTC Groundbreaking (Ambrose)**- A groundbreaking for the LTC Technology Center is planned October 22<sup>nd</sup> before the Board of Trustees meeting.
- **FCC Groundbreaking** – An informal groundbreaking for the FCC Athletic Facility will be held on September 16, 2025, before the Board of Trustees meeting.
- **Upward Bound Grant (Ambrose)**- President Ambrose shared a letter received from the U.S. Department of Education stating that funding for non-competing continuation awards with a September start date will be extended through September 30, 2025, to allow projects to remain open and continue operations until the October 1<sup>st</sup> renewal of the annual grant.

### **Capital Projects**

- **WVC Update (Gower)**- The Athletic Facility project at WVC is complete. Dr. Gower encouraged everyone to visit the facility or view it online.
- **OCC STEM Update (Gower)**- Renovations to the third-floor science rooms has been delayed due to issues an architecture and engineering firm. ADG from Mt. Carmel has now been engaged, and the project is moving forward again under their leadership.

**District Finance:** None.

### **Approval of Personnel Items:**

- **MIT Instructor Bonus (McDowell)**- Mrs. McDowell sought approval for standard annual bonuses for these six individuals.
- **Part-time Employee Raises**- Mrs. McDowell sought approval to increase the hourly rate of part-time employees. She informed SEPC of the approach and timeline that will be followed.
- **Head Coach FCC Volleyball (Kakac)**- FCC has named a new acting head coach.

**Other Business-** President Ambrose reminded the council to visit the new STEM project that was facilitated by TRIO in the OCC library.

Dean Boyce commended Krystal Riggles for working diligently to raise funds for student food pantries. Dean Boyce wishes to apply for a grant aimed at assisting food pantries and asked for permission to apply. Dr. Gower asked that the grant move through the standard grant check list process.

**Adjournment:** 4:42 p.m.

**Next Meeting:** TBD