

GOVERNING BOARD MEETING
FOR THE JOHN C. DUNHAM STEM PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL
Governing Board Minutes
Tuesday, May 11, 2021 1:00 pm

1. Call to Order

Dr. Craig called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm

2. Roll Call

Present: Dr. Sherrick, Dr. Norrell, Dr. Hichens, Dr. Craig, and Dr. Talley

Also present: Dr. Patel, Mrs. Carter, and Mrs. Buenrostro

3. Public Comment

Joe Matuch

Hello, again. My name is Joe Matuch, and I taught 4 years at the John C. Dunham STEM Partnership School. Before I begin, I want to let everyone know that I have the permission of my HR department to be here today. As I did last time, I'd like to thank you for your leadership during this pandemic. Leading is not easy, especially under these circumstances. Back in January, this board sent out a letter that read: "Rest assured that all stakeholders have an interest in continuing the partnerships and as such, we will use the coming weeks and months to collaborate on an improved STEM School model." At this point, that statement is hard to believe. For 4 months now, you've been pushing forward a recommendation to terminate the school's agreement. The rush to terminate the partnership continues today. On the agenda, we have "Consideration to terminate the John C. Dunham STEM Partnership Agreement" followed immediately by "Approve the recommendation to terminate the John C. Dunham Partnership School Agreement..." What you told us was a time to "reevaluate" the STEM School in practice has been a time to terminate the school agreement as quickly as possible. Frankly, most of this process could have been better. You could have been open about the primary reasons behind this decision. You could have included the teachers. And we could have come up with a plan for the future together before you made the decision to terminate the agreement. We've been told there is a "duplication of services" with the STEM School open. However, none of the partner districts currently provide students in grades 3-8 with over 2 hours of STEM-focused instruction each day. None has a program like this that is open to absolutely anyone, regardless of test scores or teacher recommendations. We've also been told the districts aren't getting a good return on the \$500,000 they each invest each year in the school. That's just not true. For instance, according to the Illinois School Report Card, one partner district's budget is \$242 million. \$500,000 is a mere two-tenths of a percent of that! That district spends less on JCD STEM students than on any others. So please don't continue to tell us we aren't "getting a return on our investment" or that it costs too much. Honestly, you know who I think it costs too much for: Aurora University. As Dr. Sherrick said at the February 9 governing board meeting, and I'm paraphrasing, "The university takes its students' tuition dollars and then gives them to our students without getting much back in return." Starting the STEM School was always about providing a unique education model for the participating districts to emulate. However, the university didn't just build a state-of-the-art school expecting nothing in return. As a member of

a local Board of Education explained to me recently, the University hasn't gotten enough recognition. Recognition, which came at first, but the school's staunchest supporter retired a few years after it opened. Local politicians who stumped for the school retired or moved on. New superintendents have arrived. The school's blog, news, and other sections stopped being updated regularly. The flood of attention and funding that engulfed the school at first has become a trickle. So it seems like this isn't about the school's performance or its cost to the districts. Maybe the model is cumbersome, as you've said, but ultimately I think that would be a reason to renew focus on making it better over the next few years; not terminating it. So here we are. I wish this were a time to thank everyone for taking a chance on opening this exceptional school; to celebrate 7 years of extraordinary work; and to look forward to something new. Maybe that will come at the end of next year. In the meantime, I hope we use the next year to make a plan to improve STEM and pedagogy in general for ALL of our students. That way, we will maximize our investment in the STEM School. It will take COOPERATIVE, OPEN, and HONEST work. There's still time to do this the right way: together.

Marea Clement

I made a six-year commitment. My family talked about the limited options of STEM for my daughter and based on the options we made the commitment to come to STEM. I tried to have communication with the Board regarding their decision, and the Board failed to communicate. The Board Members didn't follow through, and didn't stick to their commitment. You have failed the community and the students. The Board for district 204 also made changes to the minutes. The lack of leadership is disappointing.

Angela Shields

Students of this school will be left with an educational void. They're at a school where they're thriving, not because of extra STEM content... but because of the "ow" students are taught. It's an absurd claim to say you can transform your classrooms into something even remotely comparable in one year.

Those with students in district schools know that extra STEM programming does not change the learning atmosphere of classrooms. Closing the school leaves inadequate options. And closure is tragic because it's so senseless and avoidable.

What necessitates closure of this school? We've only heard pseudo-reasons carrying no logical weight. I've even been told an honest conversation isn't possible, so is this board not bound to transparency?

Districts signed a contract to address issues in "good faith". If there are aspect of the contract that aren't working, you vote to amend...it doesn't require dissolution. How can you ethically decide you are not going to problem-solve? A January email told us to "rest assured" the school will continue, but it seems there was a pre-determined outcome of closure. When and where was this decided?

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "The time is always right to do what is right." Thus far, only one district has voted to exhibit integrity and commitment.

We continue to hear the desire to bring STEM back to your districts. No one is buying this as a legitimate reason for closure...because logit tells us not only could you simultaneously keep the

school and expand STEM in your districts...but the STEM school would actually serve that stated goal if utilized properly...no detract from it

If you could do both, but you choose not to... Why?

Board members have backtracked and said "it's not about the money". There's also been a smoke-screen of the term "fairness". There's nothing unfair about a STEM school with racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic diversity with lottery selection.

IL House Bill 2170 aims to expand educational equity & has a goal to "increase access to programs for students meeting or exceeding state standards" ... if students are excelling, you allow them to excel further. You don't take away opportunities!

Over 70% of STEM students meet or exceed state standards in math and science...but you're ready to move those students backwards rather than use the school to allow MORE students to have access to STEM's proven success. The contract allows for 500 students!

And what amazing opportunity for all districts students to benefit from the STEM school via remote learning...what a Harvard educator called "the genie that is now out of the bottle."

If you're NOT interested in how the STEM school can quickly & directly bring STEM to your districts, then it seems district advancement is NOT your first priority as you say. You are exhibiting that your primary goal at this point is to close the school no matter what.

What's the honest answer to "why"? ...A tribune article proposed closure is because STEM's success highlights district deficits... Or, is it just more work to collaborate than you want to do?

What an injustice to all students! It seems they are victims of selfish passivity. They deserve more than this, and you are called to serve students better than this.

Aiden Neil

This is an amazing school

Lynn Neil

East Aurora voted quickly and without it being on their agenda. Is this legal?

Batavia's board we are still confused as to what actually happened, but according to Dr. Hitchens she said she would stay in the partnership if other districts did.

West Aurora originally put off their vote due to lack of information according to a board member.

Indian Prairie voted they want the STEM school to remain open! The president of the board kept saying OVER and OVER again that there is a weight in the back of his mind, continually coming back to a feeling from his heart and concluding that keeping the STEM school open IS the right thing to do.

The Vice President WHO IS A CURRENT ATTORNEY mentioned that if this were a school in their own district they would not be closing it down this fast. AS A LAWYER, he talked about how this is NOT THE CORRECT PROCESS.

There was a COMMITMENT to the STEM students. There was ALSO A GOAL to bring it back to the students in the home districts and THEREFORE there was a COMMITMENT TO ALL THE STUDENTS in ALL THE DISTRICTS.

An excuse commonly mentioned is that the STEM school is only serving a small number of students. ALMOST EVERYONE is missing the point here. This school not only affects the kids in the STEM school but should be serving ALL KIDS back at the home districts!! Shutting the school

down will not help the children in the home schools at all. WE HAVE THE PERFECT MODEL ALREADY IN PLACE!! What your focus SHOULD BE is GETTING the stem model BACK TO THE KIDS IN THE HOME DISTRICTS AS WELL, not shutting it down. And let's fill it to the maximum capacity of 500 students which it was built for!

Our STEM school has so much cultural diversity brought together by all 4 districts.

Getting rid of THIS school is the COMPLETE OPPOSITE direction we are supposed to be heading. Every one of you will make a decision and the message that you are sending will be heard loud and clear by ALL! With all our busy lives, lots of people have lost a connection with themselves. Take a moment to think of who you are, not what has become. You were all born with a heart and your parents hopefully raised you to think with your heart. Please, don't be pushed or pressured into making a decision that you know is not coming straight from your heart when it all started with a commitment to these kids.

Robert Schanz

The way this process has been conducted is disappointing. You say that you are not dissolving the partnership but you are voting to close the school. The Board is not committed and the Members are pushing away the responsibility. I am proud that district 204 voted against closing the school; however, there have been many failures and cannot agree with closing the school.

Paul Schanz

Please do not close the school

Ron Neil

Students and parents made a commitment to the STEM school. The commitment can be seen in the test scores and the people the students are becoming. The students also have the courage to stand here and talk to the Board. In the company I work when we have a problem we do not stop, we troubleshoot the problem.

Gabrielle Benelli

I understand the difficulty in this situation. The Board has heard from parents in many ways, but the Board has not communicated with parents. Which are the problems that are leading to the Board to think of closing the school? Parents have received no answer to the question and there has been failure to move forward with communication among all stakeholders involved. The Governing Board meetings are not the only instrument of communication. There should be a town hall or open zoom where there can be further communication.

4. Adjourn to Executive Session

Dr. Hichens motioned and Dr. Norrell seconded to adjourn to executive session.

Ayes: (5)

Nays: (0)

5. Adjourn to Open Session

Dr. Norrell motioned and Dr. Hichens seconded to adjourn to open session

Ayes: (5)

Nays: (0)

6. Consent Agenda

6.1 Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes and Executive Minutes of March 16th.

6.2 Approval of February & March 2021 Bill Listings

Dr. Norrell motioned and Dr. Hichens seconded to approve the consent agenda items 6.1 and 6.2 as presented.

Ayes: (5)

Nays: (0)

7. Information/Presentation/ Discussion

7.1 Crowe Engagement Letter

The engagement is accepted for next school year. The letter will be signed by the Board President and returned to Crowe.

7.2 Consideration to terminate the John C. Dunham STEM Partnership Agreement

Dr. Craig started the conversation by stating that there are lots of conversation and opinions regarding this decision. He stated that it has been a challenge for the past seven years to meet the purpose to impact the Fox Valley community. This is why the Board decided to take a look at the model of the school.

Dr. Talley shared that his district is thinking how to exit out from the STEM school and that Indian Prairie would like to have two years to allow current 3rd graders to finish elementary and current 6th graders to finish middle school at STEM.

Dr. Hichens shared that Batavia School district wants to meet the expectation of parents. She mentioned it breaks her heart every year to have to tell parents they were not selected in the lottery for the STEM school. The goal is to bring STEM back into the district to impact more students.

Dr. Norrell stated that she wants to continue with the partnership and that she is confident that her district will be able to absorb the students back and do even more with those students.

Dr. Sherrick added that she has listened to all comments and that she wanted to share some of the history as how the school started.

The concept began back in 2008 with a challenge for change issued by the Dunham Fund. The Dunham Fund wanted the citizens of the Fox Valley to work together and to collaborate.

Even before that, Aurora University was already in a partnership with West Aurora School district. Students from Freeman Elementary in the 4th and 5th grade came to the Institute for Collaboration and had classes. This was the genesis of the whole idea. The Institute for Collaboration facilitated the conversations, but it was a long and hard process.

Dr. Sherrick listed some of the issues that have arisen, among them, the different union each school district has, the test scores and the way they are reported.

Dr. Sherrick recalled that at the time of the opening, there was a rush to get it done. The school would have benefited from another year of planning and a manual of policies and procedures. Working with small children has been a challenge in a University Campus. Dr. Sherrick added that the idea of a partnership is voluntary, and that to have a real partnership the districts and the people have to actively want to partner.

8. Action Items

8.1 Approve the recommendation to terminate the John C. Dunham Partnership School Agreement effective July 1, 2022.

Dr. Hichens motioned and Dr. Norrell seconded the approval of action item 8.1.

Ayes: (4)
Nays: (1) Dr. Talley

8.2 STEM School Leadership for 21-22 SY

Dr. Hichens motioned and Dr. Talley seconded the approval of item 8.2. The approval of Elizabeth McAlpin and Kate Richards as Co-Directors.

Ayes: (5)
Nays: (0)

8.3 Approval of FTE for 21-22 SY

Dr. Hichens motioned and Dr. Talley seconded to approve item 8.3 as presented.

Ayes: (5)
Nays: (0)

8.4 Budget Approval for 21-22 SY

Dr. Hichens motioned to table item 8.4 budget approval as presented and Dr. Sherrick seconded.

Ayes: (5)
Nays: (0)

8.5 Governing Board Officers for 21-22 SY

President: Dr. Talley

Dr. Norrell nominated Dr. Talley for President and Dr. Hichens seconded.

Ayes: (4)
Nays: (0)

Vice President: Dr. Norrell

Dr. Hichens nominated Dr. Norrell for Vice President and Dr. Sherrick seconded.

Ayes: (4)
Nays: (0)

Secretary: Dr. Craig

Dr. Norrell nominated Dr. Craig for Secretary and Dr. Talley seconded.

Ayes: (4)
Nays: (0)

8.6 Meeting Dates for 21-22 SY

Dr. Talley motioned to approve 8.6 as presented and Dr. Hichens seconded.

Ayes: (5)
Nays: (0)

9. Adjourn

Dr. Norrell motioned to adjourn the meeting and Dr. Hichens seconded.

Ayes: (5)
Nays: (0)

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 pm.

Ana K. Buenrostro

Administrative Assistant to the Director

John C. Dunham STEM Partnership School