



MEETING MINUTES OF  
THE GOVERNING BOARD OF  
WEST40 INTERMEDIATE SERVICE CENTER #2

The West40 ISC #2 Governing Board Meeting was held on Friday, January 16, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., at 415 Lexington Street, Maywood, IL 60153. Board President Dr. Kelsall called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.

**I. Present:** Dr. Jennifer Kelsall, Dr. Ed Condon, Dr. Kirstin Kopta, Dr. Aldo Calderin, Dr. Paula DiDomenico, Dr. Leah Gautier, and Ms. Kylie Linqvist

**Present After Roll Call:** Ms. Kathleen Tomei

**Not Present:** Ms. Mary-Rita Moore, Ms. Elieen Piper-Simpson, and Ms. Dana Wesolowaski

President Kelsall declared a quorum for the West40 ISC #2 Governing Board meeting at 8:05 a.m.

**Also present:** Heidi Bellm, Stuart Brown, Lezlie Fuhr, Marianna Delinck Manley, Dr. Mark Klaisner, Lefvia T. Marrero, John Milosovic, Dr. Jayme Tighe, and Christi Tyler

**II. Approval of December 12, 2025 Meeting Minutes:** It was moved by Ms. Kylie Linqvist and seconded by Kristin Kopta that the West40 ISC#2 Governing Board approve the minutes as presented.

On call of the roll, the vote was as follows:

**Ayes:** Dr. Jennifer Kelsall, Dr. Ed Condon, Dr. Kirstin Kopta, Dr. Aldo Calderin, Dr. Paula DiDomenico, Dr. Leah Gautier, Ms. Kylie Linqvist, and Ms. Kathleen Tomei

**Nays:** None

The motion carried without dissent.

### **III. Presentations:**

#### **Heart 2 Heart Report: Ms. Pam Vujovich**

Ms. Vujovich provided an overview of the Heart 2 Heart program and shared updates on both the Heart 2 Heart Store and the Heart 2 Heart Food Mart, emphasizing the program's focus on dignity, access, and family-centered support.

- Ms. Vujovich described the Heart 2 Heart Store as a one-of-a-kind resource that offers new and donated items at no cost to families by appointment. She explained that families are supported through individualized shopping experiences designed to maintain privacy and dignity, with items available to meet the needs of households of varying sizes.
- She reported that the Heart 2 Heart Food Mart recently marked its one-year anniversary and operates as a choice-based food market rather than a traditional pantry. Families are welcome to shop for items that meet their needs, including nonperishable goods, fresh produce, refrigerated items, and frozen foods.
- Ms. Vujovich highlighted key community partnerships, including the Greater Chicago Food Depository, which supplies the majority of food, as well as local partners such as Jewel, Walmart, Panera Bread, and ChiCare. She noted that ChiCare provides 100 freshly prepared hot meals weekly, which are distributed to families through the Food Mart.
- She shared testimonials and visual examples demonstrating the impact of the program on families and staff, including remarks from program participants and West40 advocates, illustrating how the program supports families during times of hardship while promoting self-sufficiency and stability.
- Ms. Vujovich introduced Anthony Sanchez, who shared his personal experience with the Heart 2 Heart program.

Anthony shared his personal experience with the Heart 2 Heart program, describing how the program supported his family during periods of financial hardship and provided essential resources through both the Heart 2 Heart Store and Food Mart. He explained that, with encouragement and mentorship from Ms. Vujovich and program staff, he pursued entrepreneurial goals by starting a lawn care and snow removal business, enabling him to contribute financially to his household and support his siblings.

- Anthony further shared that he was later offered part-time employment at the Heart 2 Heart Food Mart, which became his first formal job experience. He described how the role provided opportunities to build confidence, develop workplace skills, and serve families facing similar challenges. Following his high school graduation, Anthony was promoted to a full-time position, where he now assists with daily operations and supports families accessing services.
- He emphasized his commitment to giving back, noting that his experiences motivate him to ensure families feel supported, respected, and welcomed, and that assistance through Heart 2 Heart can ease hardships and improve stability for others in the community.

Dr. Calderin commended Anthony for his character, work ethic, and commitment to his family and community. He noted that Anthony's story reflects West 40's values and mission and serves as a strong example of how the organization's programs both support individuals and empower them to give back. Dr. Calderin thanked Anthony for sharing his experience and recognized the positive impact of his contributions.

Ms. Vujovich concluded by inviting Board members to visit the Heart 2 Heart Store and Food Mart, thanking the Board for its continued support of the program.

#### **Financial Report: Ms. Christi Tyler**

Ms. Tyler presented the financial report to the Board and reported the following:

- January marked the one-year anniversary of two significant milestones: West40's transition to operating independently from the Lyons Township Treasurer's Office and the conclusion of the EANS funding era.
- December was a short business month with limited operational activity; however, the fund balance increased significantly, with the ending fund balance for December 2025 reported at approximately \$8.05 million, reflecting steady growth throughout the first half of Fiscal Year 2026.
- The increase in fund balance was attributed to strong monthly revenues, controlled operating expenditures, minimal capital expenditures in December, the receipt of delayed payments from the Cook County Behavioral Health Grant, and reimbursement requests submitted for the School-Based Mental Health Grant.
- The fund balance has grown consistently month over month since July, increasing from approximately \$4.82 million at the beginning of the fiscal year to over \$6.38 million at

the end of November, before the December balance.

- Ms. Tyler reminded the Board that West40 had previously been notified that the School-Based Mental Health Grant would sunset in December 2025; however, Cara Wiley, Director of Grants, received communication from the U.S. Department of Education indicating that the grant is currently considered open. Additional guidance regarding next steps is pending, and administration will continue to monitor developments and provide updates as information becomes available.

**Assistant Executive Director: Dr. Jayme Tighe**

Dr. Tighe provided an update on the organization’s strategic planning work and key programmatic initiatives and reported the following:

- Dr. Tighe noted that West40 is currently in Year 5 of its first strategic plan and is actively engaged in developing the Years 6–10 strategic plan. She reported that the Cabinet is analyzing and synthesizing data to identify key findings that will inform the next phase of the organization’s strategic direction.
- She shared progress on several Year Five strategic goals, including legislative work related to Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) and efforts to influence the development of new adequacy targets for alternative education programs. Dr. Tighe noted that leadership is developing a model to define a prototypical safe school and to support long-term financial sustainability for these programs.
- Dr. Tighe reported on the completion of organization-wide “We Will Be What You Need” needs-assessment meetings conducted across departments, including communications, grants, professional learning, and innovation. She explained that the results are being used to ensure alignment between departmental supports and program needs, as well as to strengthen internal services for staff.
- She provided updates on student program expansion, noting the addition of three new ALOP sites and twenty new K–3 programs during the current year. Dr. Tighe reported that approximately 185 staff members are currently assigned to student-focused programs, reflecting continued organizational growth in direct student services.
- Dr. Tighe further shared updates on school improvement efforts, noting that West40 continues to support districts through collaboration, professional learning, and technical assistance related to accountability systems, improvement planning, and the use of data

to inform instructional and organizational decisions.

- Dr. Tighe elaborated on the LEAD professional growth program, noting that it was developed in response to staff survey feedback and is designed to build leadership capacity across the organization. She explained that the program includes three structured pathways: a mentorship-based track for advocates interested in transitioning into coordinator roles, a “Lead From Where You Are” track open to all staff focused on developing leadership skills in current roles, and a third track supporting newly promoted leaders with training on supervision, evaluation, communication, and navigating difficult conversations. Dr. Tighe emphasized that the LEAD program is intended to strengthen internal leadership pipelines, promote professional growth, and support long-term organizational sustainability.
- Dr. Tighe shared the timeline for finalizing the next strategic plan, noting that a draft timeline for the Years 6–10 plan will be presented at the May 15 Governing Board meeting, followed by a Cabinet retreat in June to finalize the plan in preparation for an August launch.
- Dr. Tighe concluded by noting that the strategic planning process remains collaborative and data-driven, with an emphasis on aligning organizational goals, staff capacity, and program impact to best serve students, families, and partner districts.

#### **Executive Director Report: Dr. Mark Klaisner**

Dr. Klaisner provided an update on legislative, programmatic, and organizational initiatives and reported the following:

- Dr. Klaisner highlighted ongoing legislative advocacy efforts, including policy work related to Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) and the development of adequacy targets for alternative education and safe school programs. He noted that West40 leadership has been actively involved in statewide discussions to establish more sustainable and equitable funding models for these programs.
- He reported on progress related to K–3 programming, noting that West40 remains the only K–3 program currently operating under a waiver. Dr. Klaisner shared that related legislation has passed both chambers and is currently on concurrence, which, if approved, would allow similar programming to expand statewide.

- Dr. Klaisner discussed West40’s leadership role in McKinney-Vento services for Area 1, which includes nine Regional Offices of Education in northeast Illinois. He explained that the organization has implemented a restructured model focused on collaboration, support, and mediation rather than compliance-driven or adversarial approaches, and noted the formation of a cross-divisional team to support this work.
- He provided an update on the organization’s legislative advocacy “SWAT Team,” a volunteer group of staff members engaged in policy monitoring, witness slips, and legislative outreach. Upcoming advocacy efforts will focus on EBF funding, alternative education policy, and other legislative priorities impacting West40 and the region.
- Dr. Klaisner reported on school improvement efforts at the state level and within Chicago Public Schools, noting that West40 staff have provided professional learning and technical assistance on accountability systems, designations, and improvement planning across multiple regions.
- He shared updates on global connections and partnerships, introduced AESA Global representatives Jason Hiruo and Meimei Zou, and described the alignment between West40’s mission and the organization’s global education initiatives. Dr. Klaisner emphasized that the focus of global work is on relationship-building, cultural understanding, and authentic learning experiences for both students and educators.
- Dr. Klaisner concluded by noting that many of these initiatives originated through West40’s strategic planning process, staff needs assessments, and legislative engagement, and emphasized the organization’s continued commitment to expanding impact while remaining mission-driven.

## **Global Connections / AESA Global Remarks –**

### **Stuart Brown**

Mr. Stuart Brown provided an update on West40’s global connections work and the developing partnership with AESA Global. He shared that the collaboration reflects a strong alignment of vision, values, and purpose, emphasizing that the work centers on building relationships rather than solely on international travel.

- Mr. Brown noted that interest from districts and educators across the West40 region has been significant and growing, with early participation exceeding initial expectations. He attributed this enthusiasm to West40’s readiness as a region and the strong interest

among districts in expanding global learning opportunities for students and staff.

- He shared that upcoming global initiatives will include student experiences, educator professional learning, and collaborative exchanges, with programming designed to foster meaningful connections between educators and students across countries. Mr. Brown emphasized that these experiences are intentionally structured to support learning, cultural understanding, and long-term collaboration.
- Mr. Brown highlighted that global work will not be limited to travel, noting the importance of virtual connections and sustained partnerships that allow students and educators to engage with global peers beyond a single experience.
- He expressed appreciation for the AESA Global team and noted that their approach complements West 40's mission by prioritizing authentic relationships, shared learning, and equity of access. Mr. Brown stated that the partnership is expected to continue expanding as additional opportunities are developed and shared with districts.

Mr. Brown concluded by expressing enthusiasm for the partnership and confidence that the collaboration with AESA Global will provide meaningful, mission-aligned global learning opportunities for West40 students and educators.

### **Jason Hiruo and Meimei Zou**

Mr. Jason Hiruo and Ms. Meimei Zou, representatives of AESA Global, addressed the Board and provided an overview of AESA Global's mission and partnership with West40.

- Mr. Hiruo described AESA Global's work in connecting educators and students across countries through relationship-based global education experiences. He emphasized that the partnership with West40 is grounded in a shared commitment to preparing students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world by building cultural understanding, global competence, and authentic relationships, rather than focusing solely on travel.
- He explained that AESA Global currently operates in 17 countries and supports collaboration through multiple formats, including educator exchanges, student partnerships, virtual collaboration projects, and international professional learning experiences. Mr. Hiruo noted that these experiences are intentionally designed to foster peer-to-peer learning and meaningful engagement between schools and communities.

- Ms. Zou shared reflections from her visit to West40, noting that conversations across departments consistently emphasized relationships, care, and student-centered decision-making. She observed that the Heart 2 Heart program exemplifies West40's mission by pairing compassion with intentional systems of support, and she expressed appreciation for the organization's focus on serving students with dignity.
- Ms. Zou further commented on the importance of supporting students through empathy, cultural understanding, and inclusive practices, noting that small, intentional actions by educators can have a lasting impact on students' lives. She emphasized that global programming can serve as an additional tool to strengthen these values and expand opportunities for students and educators.
- Both speakers expressed enthusiasm for the growing partnership and shared their belief that West40's regional leadership and mission-driven approach position the organization well to expand global learning opportunities. They affirmed AESA Global's commitment to working collaboratively with West40 to develop programming that aligns with regional needs and supports students, educators, and communities.

#### **IV. Public Comment**

Mr. John Miosovic invited Board members to attend and participate in the Student Citizen of the Year Award event scheduled for March 19, noting an adjusted start time of 5:00 p.m., and shared highlights of the event and student recognition items.

Ms. Heidi Bellm thanked leadership and partners for their continued collaboration and shared a brief update on communication efforts, noting the development of a district gazette intended to highlight school accomplishments and celebrate positive work occurring across West40 schools.

#### **V. Adjourned:**

Member Dr. Aldo Calderin moved, seconded by Ms. Kylie Linqvist. Be it resolved, the West40 ISC# 2 Governing Board hereby adjourned at 9:06 a.m.

The next West40 Governing Board Meeting will be held on Friday, March 20, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., at 415 Lexington Street, Maywood, IL 60153.