



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

The West40 ISC #2 Governing Board Meeting was held on Friday, March 20, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., at 415 Lexington Street, Maywood, IL 60153. Board President Dr. Kelsall called the meeting to order at 8:07 a.m.

**I. Present:** Dr. Jennifer Kelsall, Dr. Ed Condon, Dr. Leah Gautier, Ms. Kylie Linquist, Ms. Eileen Piper-Simpson, and Ms. Kathleen Tomei

**Not Present:** Dr. Aldo Calderin, Dr. Paula DiDomenico, Dr. Kirstin Kopta, Ms. Mary-Rita Moore, and Ms. Dana Wesolowski

President Kelsall declared a quorum for the West40 ISC #2 Governing Board meeting at 8:08 a.m.

**Also present:** Dr. Mike Popp, Ms. Lefvia T. Marrero, Dr. Jayme Tighe, and Ms. Christi Tyler

**II. Approval of January 16, 2026 Meeting Minutes:** It was moved by Dr. Ed Condon and seconded by Dr. Leah Gauthier 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. Leah Gautier, Ms. Kylie Linquist, Eileen Piper-Simpson, and Ms. Kathleen Tomei

**Nays:** None                                      The motion carried without dissent.

**III. Presentations:**

**Legislative Report - Dr. Mike Popp**

Dr. Popp provided a comprehensive legislative and organizational update, highlighting both the historical impact and future direction of West40's advocacy efforts. He emphasized the collaborative nature of this work, noting partnerships with organizations such as IARSS, IASB, ISBE, and others, as well as coordination with legislators and lobbyists. He reflected on the early challenge of excluding ROEs and ISCs from Evidence-Based Funding (EBF), which led to initial supplemental appropriations of approximately \$5.4 million in FY18 and \$6.9 million in FY19. These efforts ultimately resulted in inclusion in EBF, bringing an additional \$17.29 million in FY20 and generating ongoing funding of over \$248 million since FY21. Additional advocacy successes included increases to the ROE/ISC services grant (\$48 million), partial restoration of the safe schools grant (\$41.1 million), eligibility for ESSER funding (\$33.9 million), and access to school maintenance grants. Altogether, statewide advocacy efforts have generated over \$401 million, with West40 receiving approximately \$99 million (24.69% of total appropriations), closely aligned with the proportion of students served.

Dr. Popp underscored that these accomplishments result from sustained advocacy by "regular people" working collectively to improve student outcomes. He highlighted the significant growth of West40 programs, noting that the organization now serves a substantial share of students in alternative education statewide. Enrollment has increased from approximately 1,439 students in 2018 to over 3,500 today, with continued growth expected. He also noted that West40's Alternative Learning Opportunities Programs (ALOPs) is now among the largest in the state, with only 118 of 934 educational units having a higher average student enrollment. Statewide, ALOP programs have expanded significantly, growing from 9 programs in 2018 to at least 20 by 2025, with student enrollment more than doubling, reflecting the increasing recognition of ALOP as an effective strategy to address truancy and support student success. He further highlighted the organization's financial transformation, noting that West40 has moved from a deficit of over \$1 million in 2018 to more than \$9 million in reserves today, providing a stable financial foundation.

Dr. Popp also reviewed key legislative wins beyond funding, including establishing ISCs as TRS employers, lifting restrictions on secondary employment for regional superintendents, ensuring equitable IMRF benefits, securing eligibility for school maintenance grants, and formalizing ROEs/ISCs as perpetual learning partners in the statewide system of support. He outlined current legislative priorities, including codifying the K-3 ALOP program into school code (HB 3772), increasing EBF funding, addressing licensure reciprocity issues, replacing expiring McKinney-Vento funding, improving waiver processes for organizations without bargaining units, and advocating for a more equitable distribution of truancy-related funding. Additional advocacy efforts include expanding allowable uses of the County Schools Facility Tax to include security and mental health supports and seeking increased funding for ROE/ISC services to keep pace with inflation.

Looking ahead, Dr. Popp described a long-term legislative strategy to refine the EBF formula to better reflect the actual cost of alternative education programs. This includes proposing multipliers to increase adequacy targets for safe schools and other alternative programs while adjusting funding levels for ALOP programs to maintain balance and sustainability. He also highlighted the strength of West40's legislative advocacy team, which continues to grow and mobilize support through coordinated efforts, including testimony, witness slips, legislative visits, and stakeholder engagement. He concluded by emphasizing West40's expanding sphere of influence across the state, noting that the organization's work is shaping practices and systems beyond its region and positioning it to continue advancing student outcomes statewide.

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

Ms. Tyler provided a brief financial update, highlighting West40's strong fiscal position, a direct result of program growth and sustained advocacy efforts. She noted that the organization's fund balance has grown significantly—by approximately 93% since July 1—which reflects both increased revenue and careful financial management. She also referenced the prior year's milestone of paying off debt certificates, further strengthening the organization's financial standing. Ms. Tyler emphasized that this progress is closely tied to the expansion and success of programs led by the team, particularly in alternative education, which has made financial operations more stable and predictable. As a result, West40 has now achieved its long-term financial goal of maintaining a reserve equivalent to three months of operating funds, a benchmark not met in a very long time and a major accomplishment for the organization.

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

Dr. Tighe shared several updates and highlights during her report. She began by reflecting on the Student Citizen Of The Year Award (SCOTY) event, thanking those who attended and noting it was a highly successful evening honoring 142 students. The event featured an opening performance, and each student received a certificate, medal, and water bottle. She emphasized that the most meaningful feedback from nominators was not centered on academics, but rather on students' leadership, respect, and ability to encourage one another—qualities that reflect the broader mission of education and student development.

She also reported on the recent job fair, which included participation from approximately 30 school districts and was well-received overall. Feedback from Gina Sierra indicated success, with consideration already given to adjustments for next year, including timing and structure. Dr. Tighe then provided a detailed update on the strategic planning process, noting that work began in August with the analysis of multiple data sources, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews. These were synthesized into key findings and organized into three core areas: serving students, serving staff, and serving the region. An overarching strategic priority was identified to expand West40's service and impact through responsible and sustainable growth,

strong financial stability, and alignment of programs, partnerships, and resources. She noted that the process is on track, with a full draft expected to be shared at the May governing board meeting and final refinements planned for June.

Dr. Tighe highlighted that the shift to organizing the plan around who West40 serves, rather than what it does, aligns strongly with the organization's mission and stakeholder feedback. She also discussed her involvement with IARSS in rebranding the statewide continuous improvement process, aiming to position regional offices as the primary support system for districts across Illinois. This effort includes developing a toolkit and training all regional offices by August.

Additional updates included strong progress in student programs, with enrollment reaching approximately 3,500 students and meeting the March 1 target. She shared that the West40 data app is being successfully piloted and will be launched more broadly at the June ALOP Summit. The CES team has completed all required school visits and compliance checks, and the Professional Learning (PL) team has delivered 69 EmpowerEd sessions this year, supporting over 550 educators across most districts.

Finally, Dr. Tighe noted the expansion of services into Chicago Public Schools. Although state grant funding is ending, demand for support remains high, and West40 has secured service agreements to continue this work, positioning itself as a key approved learning partner within CPS.

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

No one chose to speak.

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

Member Dr. Ed Condon moved, seconded by Ms. Elieen Piper-Simpson. 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, May 15, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., at 415 Lexington Street, Maywood, IL 60153.