



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

The West40 ISC #2 Governing Board Meeting was held on Friday, October 17, 2025 at 8:00 a.m., at 415 Lexington Street, Maywood, IL 60153. Board President Dr. Kelsall called the meeting into order at 8:02 a.m.

I. Present: Dr. Jennifer Kelsall, Dr. Ed Condon, Dr. Kirstin Kopta, Dr. Aldo Calderin, Dr. Paula DiDomenico, Ms. Kylie Lindquist, Ms. Mary Rita Moore, and Ms. Elieen Piper-Simpson

Present After Roll Call: Ms. Dana Wesolowaski

Not Present: Dr. Leah Gauthier and Ms. Kathleen Tomei

President Kelsall declared a quorum for the West40 ISC #2 Governing Board meeting at 8:03 a.m.

Also present: Maria-Elena Agera, Lezlie Fuhr, Joe Gage Dr. Mark Klaisner, Rene Makris, Lefvia T. Marrero, Dr. Jayme Tighe, and Christi Tyler

II. Approval of September 19, 2025 Meeting Minutes: It was moved by Ms. Moore and seconded by Ms. Lindquist that the West40 ISC#2 Governing Board approves 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, Ms. Kylie Lindquist, Ms. Mary Rita Moore, and Ms. Elieen Piper-Simpson

Nays: None

The motion carried without dissent.

III. Presentations:

Community Relations Report - Maria-Elena Agrela, Director

1. Overview and Philosophy

María-Elena opened by thanking the board for their time and commitment during a busy season. She reflected on her 11 years at West40 and shared an Aristotle quote—“The essence of life is to serve others and do good”—as the guiding principle of her work. Her daily mission is to meet families and schools where they are, ensuring West40’s outreach reflects compassion, consistency, and authenticity.

2. 2024–2025 Community Engagement Highlights

Using her presentation data, María-Elena summarized a year of remarkable outreach:

- 217 total meetings, including 48 planning meetings
- 136 community and school events, 42 resource fairs, and 25 large-scale community gatherings
- 45 events supporting ALOP programs
- 7 immigration network meetings (now called “Adelante”)
- 10 Family Engagement (FACE Forward) network meetings
- 2 new Nurses Network sessions
- 11 immigration resource presentations and 12 professional trainings
- 21 Back-to-School events and 1,700 backpacks distributed through the Backpack GiveBack initiative

3. Key Networks and Collaborations

María-Elena highlighted three West40-led networks and several partnerships:

- FACE Forward: Monthly family engagement meetings; next session November 7, 2025.
- Adelante Network: Focused on immigration resources, now meeting biweekly due to increased regional need.
- Nurses Network: Quarterly sessions (next meeting January 13, 2026) focused on public health support and school wellness.

She also serves on or partners with over a dozen regional networks including the Community Alliance, Cook County Digital Equity Council, Alliance for Resiliency and Equity, and the Illinois Department of Labor Community Roundtable.

4. Signature Events and Impact

- Backpack GiveBack (BPGB): 43 community partners, 30+ volunteers, and approximately 700 backpacks distributed, serving roughly 1,500 attendees. Plans for 2026 include expanding to two locations (Cicero and Berwyn) to increase accessibility.
- ALOP Support: Organized 20+ school events, family nights, and resource fairs; piloting virtual community resource fairs to reach more families.
- Community Projects: Participated in the Suicide Prevention Summit, Special Needs Prom, Cookies and Cocoa family night, and the Brookfield Zoo Hispanic Heritage Fest. She also serves on design and leadership teams, including the Soul Shop committee.

5. Community Resources and Communications

The West40CommunityResources.org website has seen consistent growth:

- 787 visits in September 2025, up from 346 in July.
 - The Immigration Resource Guide newsletter has received 21,000+ views within days of publication.
- She emphasized ensuring all shared resources are vetted, reliable, and trustworthy.

6. Future Goals

Looking ahead, María-Elena's goals include:

- Supporting more students and families through deeper engagement.
- Expanding staff capacity, beginning with the new Community Resource Specialist (Martha Ramirez) and exploring funding for a Community Health Worker position.
- Building new parent engagement and public health initiatives to meet families "where they are."
- Continuing grassroots partnerships and maintaining strong cross-departmental collaboration.

María-Elena concluded by sharing photos of recent events highlighting staff, students, and partners across West40's communities.

She reiterated gratitude to the board and colleagues for their shared commitment to service and collaboration.

María-Elena can be reached at meagrela@west40.org | West40CommunityResources.org.

Financial Report: Ms. Christi Tyler

Ms. Tyler presented the financial update through September 2025, noting that operations remain steady with the exception of additional summer work payments. The ending fund balance stands at \$4.9M, reflecting healthy fiscal management across the quarter.

She cautioned the board that health benefit renewals are expected to rise between 17–27%, which may impact budgeting.

Christi also reported that the grants team has applied for \$3.8M in competitive funding, including opportunities supporting special education leadership, homeless student services, school safety, after-school programming, and mental health initiatives.

She thanked the board for its continued support and expressed readiness to address any questions regarding West40's financial position and funding outlook.

Assistant Executive Director Report: Dr. Jayme Tighe

Dr. Tighe provided updates on the strategic planning process and statewide school improvement initiatives. She emphasized that West40's strategic plan is an *evolution* rather than a new start — the organization is now entering Years 6–10 of implementation, focused on continuous improvement.

The Cabinet team has been divided into six working groups, each analyzing distinct data sets including:

- Student and staff survey results
- External evaluations (conducted by Goshen and AESA)
- Internal and external stakeholder surveys

- Focus group data from six organization-wide sessions

These analyses will identify strengths and growth areas, which will then be synthesized into themes and strategic priorities, later refined into actionable goals. Dr. Tighe noted that a draft of the updated strategic plan will be shared with the board for feedback in the coming months, with finalization scheduled for June during the leadership retreat, ensuring full implementation by August 2026.

Dr. Tighe also introduced the new Statewide Framework for Success, developed collaboratively by IARSS, IPA, IASA, IASB, and ISBE in alignment with Dr. Sanders's plans. The framework promotes continuous improvement across all areas of district operations—not only academics but also HR, leadership, and systems improvement.

As part of this initiative, ROEs and ISCs will host state-funded "Launch" meetings to help schools engage in improvement planning and connect with free professional learning supports and resource repositories.

She encouraged board members to explore the linked materials provided in her documentation and reaffirmed that West40 remains a leading partner in shaping and supporting the state's continuous improvement efforts.

Executive Director Report: Dr. Mark Klaisner

1. Leadership and Recognition

Dr. Klaisner began by commending Dr. Tighe and the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) community of practice she leads. The initiative, now statewide, has positioned West40 as a leader in professional collaboration across Illinois. Districts and agencies, including CPS, are associating the work directly with West40, reflecting Dr. Tighe's leadership and West40's growing statewide influence.

He noted that West40's three main pillars—student programs, safety, and professional learning—have gained recognition not only across Illinois but nationally. Teams are now engaging with education leaders as far as Connecticut, Texas, California and Minnesota highlighting the organization's expanding footprint.

2. Immigration Issues in the West40 Region

Dr. Klaisner described the immigration challenges facing the community as intense and rapidly evolving. West40 has held two well-attended open houses (with nearly 60 participants) to support staff members and provide factual, apolitical information. He emphasized the balance between West40's governmental role and its humanitarian commitment, noting the fine line between advocacy and political perception.

3. Apple Distinguished Educator Event

West40 hosted an Apple Distinguished Educators conference with approximately 60 attendees from the Midwest. The event showcased West40's facilities and innovation. Dr. Klaisner and Dr. Mike Lubelfeld were invited speakers.

The group later visited Berwyn South School District, extending the collaboration with local partners.

4. National and Statewide Leadership

- AESA (Association of Educational Service Agencies): Dr. Klaisner continues to serve in a national leadership cohort on educational service agency leadership and will co-present in December on strategic and succession planning.
- IARSS Presidency: He highlighted ongoing work around school approval, improvement efforts, and audit delays, noting that many regional offices are similarly behind due to state-level processing issues.

5. Professional Learning and AI Initiatives

The Professional Learning Team remains highly active and visible throughout the region, supporting districts with workshops, institute days, and professional development.

Recent highlights include:

- Several staff were invited as judges for an AI Challenge, demonstrating West40's leadership in educational technology.
- Increased involvement in institute day programming, which is now reaching more districts.

6. Student Programs

West40's student programs continue to expand, now serving four new districts.

Highlights include:

- Ongoing advocacy for K–3 supports through new legislative efforts, separating early learning policy from discipline-related bills.
- Development of a data reporting app for ALOP (Alternative Learning Opportunities Program) data, soon to be in use by multiple regional offices.
- Launch of a statewide ALOP network with over 20 participants.
- Continued growth of Heart-to-Heart (H2H) and food programs, with strong turnout from advocates and families.

- Opening of a student-run embroidery shop, providing employability training for seniors and young adults (ages 18–22).

7. CES and Safety Work

The CES/Safety team hosted the 20th Annual Safety Conference on October 1, drawing 800 attendees. The event received strong media coverage and positive feedback.

The team is now holding kickoff meetings for districts scheduled for compliance reviews and continuing to manage non-public school recognition on behalf of the State Board.

8. Infrastructure and Innovation

- **Data Center:** A contract is being finalized for a West40-hosted data center, modeled after a successful initiative in Texas. The center will provide data storage, backup, and retrieval services to local districts, with operations expected to begin by February 2026.
- **Embroidery Shop:** Fully operational by December 2025, serving as both a student enterprise and employability program.
- **Entrepreneurial Initiatives:** The Data Center, AI Tool development, and Embroidery Shop are part of West40's broader move toward self-sustaining innovation.

9. Strategic Plan and Succession Planning

West40's Strategic Plan continues to guide progress, with leadership by Mike, Suzy, Renee, and Jamye. The number of active goals has been refined to focus on 20 key actionable priorities, following the successful systematization of earlier initiatives.

Succession planning remains embedded in each department, ensuring continuity of leadership and vision.

10. Community and Foundation Engagement

Dr. Klaisner closed by thanking the team for embodying the mission of *"showing up, walking further, and standing strong."*

11. Next Steps and Future Goals

Dr. Klaisner previewed FY26 goals

Executive Directors Report (2):

- Completion of the new 5-year Strategic Plan
- Continued alignment with the Succession Plan
- Implementation of entrepreneurial and global initiatives (AI Tool, Embroidery Shop, Data Center, Global Connections)
- Further rollout of the ALOP Data App and Media Services
- Review and possible revision of Succession Planning structures

The meeting concluded with appreciation for staff and leadership efforts, acknowledgment of the challenges faced in current community dynamics, and affirmation of West40's role as a regional, state and national leader in service, innovation, and advocacy.

IV. Public Comment:

Ms. Lezlie Fuhr announced the West40 Education Foundation Fundraiser at Zanies in Rosemont on November 12, 2025. All proceeds will support student scholarships, travel opportunities, and entrepreneurial projects.

Board members were invited to participate and share the event with their networks.

V. Adjourned:

Member Dr. Ed Condon moved, seconded by Ms. Wesolowaski. Be it resolved, the West40 ISC# 2 Governing Board hereby adjourned at 8:55 a.m.

The next West40 Governing Board Meeting will be held on Friday, December 12, 2025, at 8:00 a.m., at 415 Lexington Street, Maywood, IL 60153.