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Third Quarter LASTEM Advisory Council Meeting August 15, 2024 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

The LASTEM Advisory Council met on Thursday, August 15, 2024, at the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) in Livingston, Louisiana.

Committee Members/Representatives Present

Mark Bond
Emily DiPalma
President Rick Gallot (Proxy – Richard Vath)
Crystal Gordon
Commissioner Kim Hunter Reed
Camille Ivy-O’Connell Bentin
Dr. Lindsey Keith-Vincent (arrived after roll call)
Dr. David Lafargue (arrived after roll call)
Dr. Calvin Mackie (Proxy – Dr. Lawrence Jackson, arrived after roll call)
Dr. Lealon Martin
Jean May-Brett
Dr. Francesca Mellieon-Williams
Jamie Mixon (Proxy – Dr. Timberly Monaghan)
Ronnie Morris
Dr. Frank Neubrandner
Dr. Wendi Palermo
Christen Timmins

Committee Members Not Present

Kaneisha Akinpelumi
Larry Carter, Jr.
Robin Cosenza
Dr. Patty Glasser
Taya Loupe
Melissa Mann
Senator Beth Mizell

Representative Vincent St. Blanc
David St. Etienne
Tina Watts
Jaimee Williams
Tom Yura

Staff Members Present

Clint Coleman
Christine Norton
Carrie Robison
Jennifer Stevens

Guests & STEM Center Directors

Mark Arseneault, STEM Center Director
Daphne Barnes, STEM Center Director
Angela Boxie, STEM Center Director
Summer Dann, STEM Center Director
Jennifer DePriest, STEM Center Director
Christie Landry, STEM Center Director
[Gilbert Salcedo, STEM Center Staff](#)
Dr. Dan McCarthy, Interim STEM Center Director
Dr. Bonnie Achée, Interim Dept. Head, Dept. of Computer Science, SLU
Dr. Timberly Monaghan, Executive Director of Fast Forward, Office of Career and College Readiness, LDOE
Jessica Vallelungo, Deputy Superintendent, LDOE

Welcome and Roll Call

Commissioner Reed welcomed all attendees and called the meeting to order at 10:06 a.m. Dr. Coleman called roll, noting quorum was not obtained. Next, he welcomed Dr. Joseph Giaime, Observatory Head at LIGO, to provide welcoming remarks. Following the welcome, Dr. Coleman introduced new Council member Mr. Mark Bond, Director of Workforce Initiatives, LED FastStart.

Approval of First-Quarter Meeting Minutes

Next, Commissioner Reed noted that with additional members arriving after roll call, quorum had been obtained. She reminded the Council that the second-quarter meeting was rescheduled due to weather and then cancelled when observance of Juneteenth as a state holiday was declared. There being no questions or comments, Commissioner Reed called for a motion to approve the first-quarter meeting minutes.

On motion of Ms. Jean May-Brett, seconded by Ms. Crystal Gordon, the Council approved the first-quarter meeting minutes.

Update from Region 9 STEM Center

Dr. Coleman introduced Dr. Daniel McCarthy, Dean of Research and Innovation at Southeastern Louisiana University and Interim Director of the Region 9 STEM Center, who provided an update and future direction of the Center.

Next, Dr. Coleman introduced Dr. Bonnie Achée, Interim Department Head & Instructor, Department of Computer Science, and Director of Innovation Hub, who presented on outcomes of the Energize Computer Science Training Initiative.

Questions were asked about the background of the teachers selected for the training and demographics. Dr. Achée stated that, among the teachers selected, the average time teaching a computer science course going into this training was one year, so the material was new to many of them. Also, the initiative drew teachers from across the state and from a variety of charter schools with varied areas of expertise because it was the decision of the districts to select the teachers to participate the training.

Ms. May-Brett showed concern for the teachers who did not pass the Praxis after the considerable amount of time they spent training. She asked what the next steps would be for them. It was stated that as the initiative team moves forward into the second iteration, they would reflect on those teachers who show the desire to learn and evaluate the gaps in the five content areas. Then, they could develop work groups and workshops that speak to those needs. Ms. Timmins suggested having more conversations with the districts to select teachers to participate who would best fulfill the state's computer science needs.

Mr. Morris asked about the path forward, next steps, and barriers. Dr. Achée stated the project was contracted to Southeastern Louisiana University by the Department of Education to develop and deliver the program. While she was not aware of a specific barrier to a path forward, the program has not yet been officially approved by the Department. Last, Dr. LaFargue asked if they would be measuring the 50% who passed and if they were in a computer science position prior to the training. Dr. Achée noted that Southeastern was contracted to complete a very specific task so the team was mindful of those parameters, but she expressed support for the idea and emphasized the importance of understanding the impact of the program.

Dr. Reed congratulated Dr. Achée and the region on the great work, noted the strong recommendations brought forward, and expressed her belief that the program should be continued. She suggested a report be provided during the joint BESE and Board of Regents meeting in December.

Update from Louisiana Department of Education

Dr. Coleman introduced Dr. Timberly Monaghan, Executive Director of Fast Forward, Office of Career and College Readiness with the Louisiana Department of Education, who presented on the Department's new initiative, "Grow, Achieve, and Thrive."

Ms. Timmins asked why the Department is branching out to these different tests and whether policy or law will be changed to remove the requirement for juniors to take the ACT. In addition, she asked about funding from the state for students to take these tests. Ms. Vallelungo, Deputy Superintendent with LDOE, stated that historically there was a heavy reliance on the ACT but the new accountability focuses on future workforce needs and preparation for students to be ready for career, college, and work. The state does currently fund some of these, but vouchers are also available for students to get free testing. Mr. Morris noted there is no longer a requirement for students to take the ACT.

Questions were raised regarding Career, College, and Service Accelerators and why schools would want to do this if it is not a requirement of graduation. Dr. Monaghan stated it incentivizes a change in behavior as it is part of the school performance formula. Mr. Morris added that the focus of this design is for the incentives that are in place to be geared toward student interest. Dr. Neubrandner asked about university accelerators as he did not see any STEM-focused incentives for high-performing schools. Mr. Morris stated the main focus is getting children in school and making education attractive by making it relevant through opportunities like these. Dr. Reed added that the legislation has changed. For next year's freshmen computer science will be in TOPS Core and the Core will continue to revolve around computer science, which was why the accelerator program evolved to embed elements related to the program's focus on computer science and STEM. Dr. Monaghan also added that, because this is separate from graduation requirements, students can do both.

Dr. Neubrandner asked if there was a definition of internships within the career accelerator. Ms. Vallelungo noted that in March flexibility was added into the Work-based Learning policy; prior to that, internship requirements were very limited. She also added that there are multiple types of Work-based Learning within internships, registered apprenticeships and cooperative education, and most require approximately 106 paid contact hours with an employer coupled with 26 hours of instruction. Mr. Morris shared that the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) is planning a state tour to visit communities in every BESE district to promote the value of these internships. Ms. Daphine Barnes, STEM Center Director, shared several concerns regarding the internships, including the involvement of students who are not 18 years old are often not allowed at work sites, access for immigrant students, and funding streams. Dr. Monaghan stated that LDOE is working on guidance and noted that some students are going straight on the organization's payroll and some companies are entering into MOUs with the school districts. Regarding the student age concern, Mr. Morris shared an example from ExxonMobil, which has overcome barriers by changing the boundaries with respect to the TWIC requirements around water, enabling the company to find areas within the plants where minor students can work and be supervised appropriately. He added that BESE has received a strong commitment from

business and industry and chambers of commerce across the state to increase the number of internships over the next year and help to fund them.

Ms. Wendi Palermo, LCTCS, shared that the System is excited about the new accountability standards and stated they would be transformative for the state, and especially for schools in rural areas, which will gain more access. She added that transportation in Area 51 would be an issue.

Ms. Camille Ivy-O'Connell Bentin asked what it looks like having a connector for a business and observed that companies may be unsure with whom to communicate. Ms. Vilelunco responded that LDOE is the connector, and the agency is working to create a call center and JotForm, which will become a one-stop shop for business and industry to receive information and be directed to appropriate staff. Commissioner Reed added that during the 2024 Regular Legislative Session legislation was introduced to bring more work-based learning into a centralized location, with the Workforce Commission moving this work forward and ensuring that it is more streamlined. She noted that time would be well spent in making sure all partners are aware and hear the same message on this.

In regard to LASTEM support for work-based learning initiatives, Dr. Neubrandner suggested that, because of the size and scale of this initiative, program administrators may want to consider changing the expectations of the STEM Centers. He stated that it was his understanding that starting in FY 2025-26 the funding for the Centers could be reduced. Commissioner Reed stated that all of higher education was facing potential cuts and funding for many activities would depend on the scale of reductions and possible tax and revenue changes. Dr. Neubrandner noted his concern about finding additional funding sources to sustain the STEM Centers. Dr. Monaghan offered to help brainstorm with the STEM Centers.

Finally, in regard to the accountability system, Ms. Timmins suggested that high-achieving students, in addition to low-achieving students, require additional support. Ms. Vilelunco responded to the example Ms. Timmons provided, noting that the high-achieving student would have a positive impact by maintaining their performance at the highest level, and indicated that every student is expected to grow year-over-year, but that an extra emphasis is placed on the lowest performing 25%.

Updates from LASTEM

Dr. Coleman provided a brief report on the successful #SummerofLASTEM campaign and announced the upcoming 2024 LASTEM Summit, Regents' planned Regional STEM Center site visits in September, and the LSTA/NSTA conference in New Orleans in November. He also mentioned that the National Science Foundation (NSF) will host a Principal Investigator (PI) Grant Workshop at Louisiana Tech University. Ms. Lindsey Keith-Vincent, Louisiana Tech, added that LATECH might host two meetings with NSF: the PI Workshop, which is a partnership with QEM, and the NSF Education Advisory Committee Meeting, both during the week of November 12-14.

LIGO Science Education Center

Commissioner Reed welcomed Dr. Katzman, Program Leader at LIGO, to provide an overview of the facility and its Science Education Center.

Other Business and Adjournment

Mr. Morris informed the Council that LDOE would bring guidelines for Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the next BESE meeting, if members would like to attend or stream the meeting.

Mr. Lealon Martin invited Dr. Stephen McGuire, Endowed Emeritus Professor of Physics at Southern University A&M, to stand and be recognized for his contributions to the Nobel Prize in Physics awarded to the LIGO/VIRGO Collaboration in 2017.

Commissioner Reed invited any other comments or new business. With no additional comments or items for discussion, through unanimous consent of Council members, the meeting adjourned at 12:12 p.m.