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**Third-Quarter LASTEM Advisory Council Meeting**  
**August 27, 2025**  
**10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

The LASTEM Advisory Council met on Wednesday, August 27, 2025, at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Student Union.

**Committee Members/  
Representatives Present**

Mark Bond (Proxy – Justin Dedden)  
Dr. Suresh Chiruguru  
Robin Cosenza  
Kassie Cusachs  
Crystal Gordon  
Commissioner Kim Hunter Reed  
Dr. David Lafargue  
Dr. Lealon Martin (arrived after roll call)  
Jean May-Brett (Proxy – Kellie Boquet)  
Dr. Francesca Mellieon-Williams  
Jamie Mixon  
Dr. Frank Neubrandner (arrived after roll call)  
Dr. Wendi Palermo (Proxy – William Tulak)  
Jolen Stein  
Christen Timmins  
Richard Vath  
Sara Wolfe

**Committee Members Not Present**

Kaneisha Akinpelumi  
Blake Bertuccelli-Booth  
Larry Carter, Jr.  
Emily DiPalma  
Camille Ivy-O'Connell Bentin  
Dr. Calvin Mackie  
Taya Loupe  
Senator Beth Mizell

Ronnie Morris  
Representative Vincent St. Blanc  
David St. Etienne  
Tom Yura

**Staff Members Present**

Christine Norton  
Carrie Robison  
Jennifer Stevens

**Guests & STEM Center Directors**

Dr. Peter Sheppard, University of Louisiana at Lafayette  
Dr. Maggi Bienvenu, One Acadiana  
Donata Haley, Louisiana Department of Education  
Daphne Barnes, Region 1 STEM Center  
Summer Dann, Region 2 STEM Center  
Christie Landry, Region 3 STEM Center  
Angela Boxie, Region 4 STEM Center  
Mark Arseneault, Region 5 STEM Center  
Jennifer DePriest, Region 6 STEM Center  
Dr. Heather Kleiner, Region 7 STEM Center  
Chris Campbell, Region 8 STEM Center  
Jordan Smith-Kenning, Region 9 STEM Center

**Welcome, New Member Introductions & Roll Call**

Dr. Kim Hunter Reed, Commissioner of Higher Education, called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. Dr. Peter Sheppard, Associate Dean of Research & Strategic Initiatives and Executive Director of the Center for Excellence in Education at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, welcomed the Council and guests.

Next, Dr. Reed announced a change to the agenda, noting that the Request for Applications (RFA) would be brought to the Council for review and approval at the fourth-quarter meeting.

Ms. Jennifer Stevens introduced two new members, called roll, and noted quorum was obtained. New Council members included:

- Ms. Kassie Cusachs, High School Principal of Kenner Discovery Health Sciences Academy and Founding Faculty of Discovery Schools
- Ms. Jolen Stein, Senior Director of the Peoples Services Team at BASF Corporation

**Approval of Second-Quarter Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Reed called for a motion to approve the second-quarter meeting minutes.

*On motion of Ms. Crystal Gordon, seconded by Mr. Rich Vath, the Council approved the second-quarter meeting minutes.*

**Region 7 STEM Center Application**

Dr. Reed introduced Ms. Carrie Robison, Deputy Commissioner for Research and Sponsored Initiatives at the Board of Regents, to provide details regarding the Region 7 STEM Center. Ms. Robison stated Sci-Port Discovery Center made the decision to relinquish leadership of the Region 7 STEM Center beginning in fiscal year 2025-26, the final year of the three-year designation, and recommended Bossier Parish Community College (BPCC) be named as host. Following discussions with staff, BPCC submitted a full application in accordance with the 2023 RFA. The application was evaluated by an external consultant, who enthusiastically recommended approval.

With no questions or concerns expressed by the Council, Dr. Reed called for a motion to approve BPCC as the host entity of the Region 7 STEM Center for fiscal year 2025-26.

*On motion of Dr. David Lafargue, seconded by Ms. Francesca Mellieon-Williams, the Council approved Bossier Parish Community College as the host of the Region 7 STEM Center for FY 2025-26.*

**One Acadiana ConnectEd: Fostering Meaningful Connection Between Business & Education**

Ms. Stevens introduced Dr. Maggi Bienvenu, Director of Business & Education Connections at One Acadiana, who presented on One Acadiana's new ConnectEd program.

Dr. Reed asked about her major takeaways from the industry roundtable series. Dr. Bienvenu identified as takeaways the lessons learned from ecosystem building (building small) and career handoff with the reality that most individuals do not stay at one company for 40 or more years, but instead frequently job hop and or make career changes.

Questions were asked about the deliverables anticipated from the money received from the Future Use of Energy Louisiana (FUEL) grant. Dr. Bienvenu noted the grant period starts September 1<sup>st</sup> with the main focus of spurring innovation with energy and STEM, and they will be discussing general work-based learning. It was asked if carbon capture professional development opportunities would be available, and Dr. Bienvenu indicated she could connect those interested with LSU A&M and FUEL, as well as with the engineering department at the UL Lafayette. Dr. LaFargue added that content has been created in that area by Dr. Mark Zappi at UL Lafayette. It was also asked if One Acadiana could help support science fairs. Dr. Bienvenu stated that support would depend on the need, but One Acadiana could certainly assist in making the right connections.

Regarding the industry roundtable series, Ms. Jolen Stein commented she has experienced that industry is going after the same talent and has entered what might be called a talent war. She asked to connect with Dr. Bienvenu to discuss how to plan strategically and work through solutions. She also praised One Acadiana's externships and the benefits that come from them.

Ms. Christen Timmins thanked Dr. Bienvenu for meeting with teachers and celebrating their work as well as getting business leaders and teachers in the same room. In regard to 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade pathways, Ms. Timmins expressed she had an "aha" moment when Dr. Bienvenu mentioned focusing on a specific task or skill. She noted that helping students connect jobs with skills instead of just picking a pathway is the direction in which education should go. Dr. Martin added that it is important for students to know that education is a lifelong journey and that there is no one pathway.

#### **Update from Region 4 STEM Network Center (R4SNC)**

Next, Ms. Angela Boxie, Director of the Region 4 STEM Network Center at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, provided an update on recent work and outcomes achieved by the Center. Ms. Kellie Boquet, proxy for LA Science Teachers Association, thanked Ms. Boxie for her help with the Regional Science Fair. She added that, with Ms. Boxie's help, she had ten student projects go to the State Championships.

#### **Louisiana Department of Education**

Ms. Donata Haley, K-12 STEM Education Consultant with the Department of Education (LDOE), presented on the Greauxing STEM Stewards grant. Dr. Martin asked about the project budget and match from LDOE. Ms. Mixon stated that \$120,000 was given directly to Livingston Parish and there is no LDOE match component.

**Other Business and Adjournment**

Dr. Reed announced that the fourth-quarter Council meeting will be held in Baton Rouge. She invited any other comments or new business. With no additional comments or items for discussion, through unanimous consent of the members, the Council adjourned at 11:33 a.m.