



**Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board
Minutes (Draft) October 1, 2021
Science Museum of Virginia, Dewey Gottwald Center**

Members in attendance (in-person):

Dr. Damodar Ambur, Chris Dovi, Casey Roberts (Vice-Chair), Amy Sabarre (Chair), Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer, Zaina Tarafdar, Amy White, Dr. Brendon Albon, Rich Conti, Hannah Mercer (Sec. of Labor Office), Sec. Atif Qarni (Sec. of Education), Emily Salmon, Dr. Janice Underwood (Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer)

Members in attendance (virtual):

Dr. Susheela Shanta,

Members not in attendance:

Gary Artybridge Jr., *Dr. Venicia Ferrell (not yet appointed)*

Guests:

Ramona Taylor, Senior Assistant Attorney General, Kathy Burcher (Secretary of Education Office), Tori Feyrer (Secretary of Education Office), Hala Al-tinawi (Secretary of Education Office)

Call to Order: This inaugural meeting of the Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board opened in the RF&P Railroad Company Forum of the Science Museum of Virginia on October 1, 2021. The meeting convened at 10:00 am with Rich Conti, Chief Wonder Officer of the Science Museum of Virginia, opening and presided by Chuck English, Virginia STEM Coordinator, in the absence of having a Chair or Vice-Chair elected at this point.

General Overview:

- The meeting started with a welcome from Chief Wonder Officer Rich Conti, Science Museum of Virginia.
- Secretary of Education Atif Qarni provided opening remarks and congratulated the team on their passed legislation and inaugural meeting.
- Advisory Board members introduced themselves, including their employment (previous employment) and the educational region where they reside.

- Ramona Taylor, Senior Assistant Attorney General, presented rules for public bodies & FOIA policies. She offered her perspective and guidance as needed. The PowerPoint “Fun with FOIA” provided all of the details she covered.
- STEM Advisory Board legislation and charge were presented by Deputy Secretary of Education Kathy Burcher and Assistant Secretary of Education Tori Feyrer
- The current landscape for statewide STEM efforts was provided by Amy Sabarre, Director of PK-12 STEM Education at Harrisonburg City Schools and STEM Commission member. Amy’s PPT was embedded into the main Advisory Board PPT. Amy covered STEM efforts that preceded the STEM Commission, including simultaneous efforts led by a 4-VA grant with 5 Universities. She used data collected to help create the case for why these efforts have gained momentum over the last several years.
- Virginia STEM Coordinator Chuck English led a brief discussion on the STEM Education Advisory Board goals as written in HB2058 legislation, which was unanimously passed.
- Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer, Professor at George Mason University, and Chris Dovi, Executive Director of CodeVA, led a discussion on the definition of STEM using the Virginia Department of Education and Texas Education Agency as starting points. The Advisory Board began to collect data on what they thought were relevant points necessary for a unified definition of STEM for the Commonwealth. Variations of the acronym for STEM were also brought up and discussed briefly.
- Virginia STEM Coordinator Chuck English discussed his role and how his work includes staffing this Advisory Board. His work also includes sitting on various statewide Boards and ensuring that we have a presence at multiple meetings and will help align the State’s STEM efforts. He will also be the bridge for the Board’s communications since he is not officially a Board Member. The Advisory Board’s emails and meeting arrangements will be made through him and his ‘office.’
- The STEM Advisory Board ran through four topics asking for an informal presentation from various Board members tied to the themes listed below.
 - In-School and Out-of-School Study of STEM: Zaina Tarafdar led a discussion on how she started up an informal STEM space for HS-aged youth, in particular, females, that needed a connection to STEM and research. Rich Conti provided insights into how the Science Museum approaches STEM education, both in the building and through out-of-school time efforts. Dr. Brendon Albon, Director of STEM and Innovation at the Virginia Department of Education, discussed how STEM fits within their efforts that oversee multiple departments, including science, math, computer science, and engineering.
 - STEM in the Workforce: Casey Roberts, Executive Director, New Horizons Regional Education Centers, talked about alternative education and the jobs we should consider as STEM occupations. Funding support for internships was also highlighted. Amy White also brought up transportation for internships as a barrier. Hannah Mercer from the Secretary of Labor’s Office contributed viewpoints and concerns, including barriers with groups such as immigrants. Partnerships were addressed, and the Coastal Virginia STEM Ecosystem was discussed. It is led by Newport News (the city – not the School District). Legal

issues with internships, particularly HS internships, also present a legislative / insurance concern. Chris Dovi also mentioned that we might need to better tie with some of the successes in Career and Technology Education, which appears to have a more successful model. Dr. Damodar Ambur also highlighted a need to ensure quality education access for youth. Several people highlighted an example Zaina Tarafder discussed, which was an absence of science in some of her early schooling

- The Importance of STEM in Higher Education: Padmanabhan Seshaiyer mentioned ties with higher Ed while discussing the Virginia Math Pathways and the Data Science course. Emily Salmon from the State Council for Higher Education of Virginia talked about STEM at the post-secondary level. Amazon Future Engineers came up as an example of how we may need to shift STEM from appearing to be exclusively a 4-year degree, and it includes a range of post-secondary training opportunities.
- Equity in STEM: We did not address this area as desired. It was mentioned that Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer (Padhu) has a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion program that we may wish to revisit at another time. It would help us better integrate JEDI principles into our Advisory Board efforts.
- Chuck English discussed the next steps, including the next meeting date and communications. He also briefed the potential that the STEM Advisory Board may be asked to participate in statewide STEM programs/grants. It was mentioned that anyone wishing to run for the Chair or Vice-Chair roles let both Tori Feyrer and Chuck English know of their interests.
- Nobody was present for the public comment time allotted.
- Closing Remarks were made by the Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer, Dr. Janice Underwood.
- The meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm