

Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board  
3080 Colonial Avenue Roanoke VA 24025



Meeting Minutes

July 1, 2024

10:00 am – 2:00 pm

In Attendance:

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**Board Members Present:** Amy Sabarre (Chair), Amy White, Chris Dovi (Zoom), Rashid Farrell (Zoom), Amy Thompson (Zoom), Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer (Zoom), Casey Roberts (Zoom), Zaina Trafadar

**Ex-officios and Staff:** Zach Jacobs (Deputy Secretary of Education), Ada Sue Siler (Science Museum of Virginia Staff - Zoom), Emily Salmon (Zoom), Dr. Anne Petersen (VDOE Office of STEM & Innovation Science Coordinator), Em Cooper (VDOE Office), William Reid (Secretary of Labor Office - Zoom)

**Guests:** Dr. Susheela Shanta - Board Member Emeritus

**Topics:**

- Welcome
- Approving minutes from April and May meetings
- Status of Federal grant fiscal agent: review application that was submitted
- Moving forward with VDOE
- Open discussion board members
- Public Comment

**Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Ms. Sabarre called the meeting to order at 10:09am. She welcomed everyone and noted a quorum was not present. Minutes from April and May cannot be approved at this time.

Ms. Sabarre reviewed the agenda for the day.

**Status of Federal grant**

Amy Sabarre provided an update on the status of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) serving as the fiscal agent. She mentioned that she had submitted the application with VDOE as the fiscal agent and noted that suggested changes were made as per VDOE's requirements. The application required additional information beyond the initially compiled data, which Amy

Sabarre submitted on May 15th, allowing for a two-week review period. However, there was no further communication until VDOE completed the changes and submitted the application to grants.gov. Amy Sabarre then received a copy of the application, which reflected significant modifications made by VDOE.

Casey Roberts questioned why Amy Sabarre was not informed about the nature of the changes made by VDOE. Anne Petersen explained that VDOE leadership reviewed and amended the application before submitting it to the governor's office for further adjustments and clearance.

Rashid Farrell inquired about why board leadership was not involved in the discussions. Anne Petersen responded that VDOE maintained the integrity of the application's original spirit during the process.

Amy White sought clarification on how the decision regarding K-12 education was made. Zach Jacobs clarified that the board had voted to proceed with the application, ensuring compliance with VDOE and government requirements. He mentioned that final decisions were made through the governor's office and internal legal processes, acknowledging the constraints of time and the necessity to adhere to the original application's intent and federal appropriation guidelines.

During the discussion, Amy Sabarre expressed her concern that board representation was not included in the Virginia Department of Education's decision-making process. Zach Jacobs reiterated that the board serves in an advisory role to the governor and VDOE, and the application proceeded with changes that aligned better with the overall vision.

Anne Peterson clarified that while the application began with input from the board, VDOE took control due to time constraints, redirecting the focus. Rashid Farrell persisted in questioning why Amy Sabarre was excluded from the process.

Em Cooper acknowledged that with more time, Amy Sabarre's inclusion would have been ideal but emphasized the urgency of the timeline for making changes beneficial to teachers and students, aligning with established missions.

Amy Sabarre sought clarity on the submission date, highlighting confusion over the exact day of submission. Anne Peterson responded.

Rashid Farrell inquired about legal representation in the discussions, which Zach Jacobs confirmed included the Attorney General's representation.

Amy Sabarre announced a detailed review of application changes, emphasizing action in line with legislative mandates and noting differing legal interpretations. Chris Dovi asked about the STEM plan's focus, which Anne Peterson clarified is centered on K-12 education, with Em Cooper aligning this with the application's goals. Dovi also inquired about expanding the STEM advisory board's focus beyond K-12 to higher education and workforce development. Peterson confirmed that the Virginia Department of Education and the STEM Board will guide the next stages. Concerns were raised about changes in the application, including the reduction from four hubs to one and the removal of Career and Technical Education (CTE) connections. Peterson explained that CTE and STEM remain conceptually connected.

During the discussion, Casey Roberts inquired about the board's role in hiring the coordinator, which Em Cooper clarified as a personnel decision outside the board's purview, though recommendations are welcome. Amy White proposed forming a peer committee for advisory input in hiring. Shusheela Shanta expressed disappointment over the application's divergence from the board's original goals and questioned the Virginia Department of Education's control over STEM Board efforts. Concerns were raised about the new application's alignment with the board's vision, especially regarding computer science standards. Peterson defended the application, emphasizing strategic integration of rural populations and indicating that starting with one hub allows for future expansions.

Further discussions focused on the need for equitable opportunities across regions, with Amy White and others questioning if one hub can achieve this compared to four hubs. Emily Salmon highlighted the importance of the STEM coordinator in maintaining effective communication among stakeholders. The need for a formal arrangement between the Virginia Department of Education and the Board was discussed, with Em Cooper agreeing on the importance of clarity. Concerns about funding, travel reimbursements, and consultant selection were addressed. The meeting concluded with plans for future collaboration, updates on education initiatives, and a commitment to advancing STEM education in Virginia.

#### **Public Comment and New Business**

Ms. Sabarre asked for any public comment. None heard.

Ms. Sabarre asked for any new business. None heard

There was a final call for any remaining questions.

#### **Adjournment**

Ms. Sabarre adjourned the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 12:35m.

The meeting notes were recorded by Ada Sue Siler.