

In Attendance:

Board Members Present: Amy White, Rashid Farrell, Amy Thompson, Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer, Dr. Terry Whipple, Yu-Shen Lin, Shaina Srivastava,

Board Members Not Present: Rajbans Joshi, Edward Monroe, Victoria Chua

Ex-officios and Staff: JC LaRiviere (Office of the Attorney General), Connor Andrews (Deputy Secretary of Education), Dr. Anne Petersen (Virginia Department of Education) Patricia Davidson (Deputy Secretary of Labor), Ada Sue Siler (Science Museum of Virginia Staff), Emily Salmon *virtual* (SCHEV)

General Public Attendees: Amy Sabarre, Kaylee Fainter, Olivia King, Clyde Clark, Sinda Degenhardt

Welcome

Dr. Seshaiyer called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. and welcomed Board members, ex-officio members, staff, and guests. He noted that several Board members were delayed or unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

- Dr. Seshaiyer reflected on the establishment of the Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board under Governor Northam and noted that discussion of the Board's mission would occur later in the meeting.
- Dr. Seshaiyer acknowledged Blue Cheese Robotics for sponsoring lunch for the meeting.
- Board members, staff, ex-officio members, and guests participated in introductions and shared information regarding their professional backgrounds, STEM-related work, and current initiatives.

Dr. Seshaiyer confirmed that a quorum was not present. As a result, the Board could not conduct formal business or take official action during the meeting.

Board members were asked to review the minutes from the previous meeting. Dr. Seshaiyer noted that approval of the minutes would be deferred until the next meeting when a quorum is present.

Update from the Deputy Secretary of Education

Mr. Andrews provided an update on education priorities and strategic planning efforts underway within the Secretariat of Education. He discussed opportunities to strengthen STEM education and workforce development initiatives while aligning future policy and budget priorities with the Commonwealth's long-term goals.

- Secretary Smith is leading the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for education in the Commonwealth.
- Strategic planning efforts include goals related to early childhood education, K–12 education, higher education, museums and informal learning institutions, and adult education.
- The Secretariat is working to identify a focused set of priorities that can guide policy and budget decisions over the next three and a half years.
- Planning efforts are intended to inform future legislative priorities and preparations for upcoming General Assembly sessions.
- External partners have expressed strong interest in expanding Virginia's biomedical sector and addressing workforce demands in critical fields.
- Data science continues to be identified as a rapidly growing area of workforce need and economic opportunity.
- State leaders are exploring ways to support educational institutions as they expand programs that prepare students for careers in data science and related fields.

Dr. Seshaiyer highlighted several initiatives occurring across the Commonwealth that support data science education and workforce development. He noted the importance of coordinating these efforts to help address existing workforce shortages and strengthen Virginia's competitiveness in emerging industries.

Ms. Sabarre encouraged state leaders to consider the role of regional STEM ecosystems and community-based partners as the strategic plan is developed. She noted that these organizations serve as the "boots on the ground" within their communities and possess valuable regional expertise that can support implementation efforts. Ms. Sabarre expressed her support for the Secretary of Education's vision and encouraged continued engagement with ecosystem partners throughout the planning process.

Update from the Secretary of Labor Office

Deputy Secretary Ms. Davison provided an update on workforce initiatives, recent legislative actions, and the evolving role of technology in Virginia's labor market. She

discussed efforts to strengthen workforce participation, improve employment conditions, and prepare Virginians for a rapidly changing economy.

- The General Assembly enacted several workforce-related measures that will be implemented through the Secretariat of Labor.
- Virginia became the first state in the South to establish a paid family and medical leave program.
- Paid sick leave legislation was recently signed into law, and regulatory frameworks are currently being developed to support implementation.
- Virginia's minimum wage is scheduled to increase to \$15 per hour as part of broader efforts to improve employee retention, satisfaction, and economic stability.
- New wage theft enforcement provisions are expected to take effect beginning in 2028.
- The Secretariat continues to focus on the intersection of workforce development, Virginia Works initiatives, artificial intelligence, and emerging technologies.
- Workforce trends indicate that employees are changing jobs more frequently than in previous generations, creating opportunities to better align workforce needs with employee interests and career goals.

Dr. Seshaiyer highlighted ongoing data science education initiatives throughout Virginia and noted the significant growth in both artificial intelligence and data-related programs. He emphasized the importance of expanding participation in these fields to help address workforce needs across the Commonwealth.

Ms. Davidson noted that Governor Spanberger has placed a strong emphasis on supporting teachers, apprenticeships, and workforce development opportunities that connect education and employment pathways.

During the discussion period, Dr. Whipple asked how the Commonwealth plans to recruit the substantial workforce needed to support these initiatives. Ms. Davidson explained that each agency maintains its own hiring authority and recruitment strategies. She stated that agencies are expanding outreach efforts through schools, professional associations, community organizations, and social media platforms to attract qualified candidates and broaden awareness of available opportunities.

Ms. White noted that artificial intelligence has become a frequent topic of discussion across many organizations and referenced a recent report from the Virginia Chamber of Commerce examining AI's potential impact on the workforce. She observed that public concerns often focus on job displacement, although she believes those concerns may be overstated relative to other implications of the technology.

Ms. Davidson responded that she has been encouraging agencies to maintain a human-centered approach as they adopt new technologies. While acknowledging the value of AI in automating routine tasks and improving efficiency, she emphasized the importance of preserving human oversight and personal interaction. Ms Davidson stated that technology should support employees rather than replace them and that the Commonwealth must remain intentional in its use of resources while continuing to prioritize people and public service.

Ms. Davidson added that higher education institutions are actively exploring the appropriate role of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning environments. She described AI as a tool that can enhance educational experiences when used responsibly but emphasized that it cannot replace education itself. She further noted the importance of developing AI competency while maintaining academic integrity and appropriate classroom standards.

Dr. Seshaiyer described artificial intelligence as a valuable thought partner that can support learning, creativity, and problem-solving when used appropriately.

Dr. Whipple shared concerns regarding both the benefits and risks associated with artificial intelligence. He spoke about the importance of preparing students to use AI ethically and suggested exploring the concept of "Artificial Ethical Intelligence" as an educational framework. Dr. Whipple proposed introducing ethical AI concepts at the high school level to help students understand both the opportunities and potential dangers associated with emerging technologies before entering the workforce. He emphasized the need to maintain a balance between innovation and responsible use.

Dr. Seshaiyer noted that safeguards already exist to promote ethical AI use and stated that additional protections and best practices continue to be developed.

Ms. Sabarre emphasized that artificial intelligence should not be viewed as a replacement for STEM education. She stressed that experiential learning, hands-on exploration, and authentic educational experiences remain essential components of high-quality STEM instruction. Ms. Sabarre advocated for a balanced approach that incorporates technology while preserving meaningful learning opportunities.

Ms. White concluded the discussion by asking whether the Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board should consider developing a formal statement outlining how artificial intelligence aligns with quality STEM education and workforce preparation. Board members expressed interest in continuing the conversation during future meetings.

No formal action was taken.

Board Membership and Governance Matters

Following the confirmation that a quorum was present, the Board reviewed membership matters, considered a recommendation regarding Board participation.

Dr. Seshaiyer explained that the Board's ability to fulfill its mission depends on active participation from appointed members. He noted that continued vacancies or inactive appointments can limit opportunities to bring additional perspectives and expertise to the Board.

Ms. Srivastava moved that the Board formally request the removal of Mr. Joshi due to lack of participation. Ms. Lin seconded the motion.

During discussion, Ms. Thompson asked whether notification should be provided to Mr. Joshi before action was taken. Ms. White commented that maintaining an inactive appointment prevents the position from being filled by a more engaged participant and can limit the Board's effectiveness.

Following discussion, Dr. Seshaiyer called for a vote. The motion passed by verbal affirmation with no opposition.

Mr. LaRiviere advised that a letter should be sent to the Secretary of the Commonwealth communicating the Board's recommendation. Dr. Seshaiyer agreed to prepare and submit the correspondence.

Ms. Sabarre encouraged the Board to consider geographic and demographic representation when identifying future candidates. She noted that current membership includes significant representation from Northern Virginia while regions in Southwest Virginia, particularly Regions 6 and 7, have limited representation. She also suggested that student representation should be considered in future appointments.

Dr. Seshaiyer encouraged Board members to share appointment opportunities within their networks and to recommend qualified individuals who could contribute to the Board's work.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Dr. Seshaiyer asked members to review the minutes from the April meeting and called for a motion to approve them.

Dr. Whipple moved to approve the April meeting minutes, and Ms. Thompson seconded the motion. Hearing no discussion, Dr. Seshaiyer called for a vote. The motion was approved by verbal affirmation without opposition.

Dr. Seshaiyer concluded the governance discussion by reviewing the section of the Code of Virginia that established the Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board, highlighting the Board's statutory purpose and responsibilities in supporting STEM education and workforce development throughout the Commonwealth.

Bylaws and Mission Statement Review

The Board continued discussions that had been tabled from the previous meeting regarding proposed amendments to the Board's bylaws and the adoption of a formal mission statement. Members considered changes intended to support the Board's operations and clarify its purpose.

- The Board considered a proposed amendment to increase the minimum number of annual meetings from four to six.
- The proposed change would establish a meeting schedule occurring approximately every other month.
- Board members discussed maintaining flexibility in scheduling while ensuring meetings are planned and communicated in advance.
- The Board reviewed and refined a proposed mission statement for inclusion in the bylaws.
- Members discussed terminology, alignment with the Code of Virginia, and the importance of reflecting statewide STEM education priorities.
- A final mission statement was approved for inclusion as an introductory statement within the bylaws.
- Dr. Seshaiyer expressed interest in incorporating the mission statement into the Board's website and increasing awareness of the Board's work among state leaders and policymakers.
- The planned presentation from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) was postponed to a future meeting due to scheduling constraints.

Dr. Whipple introduced the proposed bylaws amendment, explaining that the Board frequently faces time constraints during its quarterly meetings. He stated that increasing the number of meetings from four to six annually would provide additional opportunities for discussion, strategic planning, and exploration of emerging STEM education issues.

Dr. Petersen emphasized the importance of establishing meeting dates well in advance to assist members with scheduling and participation.

Dr. Seshaiyer called for a motion to amend the bylaws to allow for the increased meeting frequency. Dr. Whipple moved the amendment, and Ms. Lin seconded the motion.

During discussion, Ms. Thompson expressed concern that cancellation of an in-person meeting could disrupt the intended balance between virtual and in-person meetings. Dr. Petersen responded that sufficient flexibility should be incorporated into the scheduling process to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. Ms. Lin suggested that meetings could be cancelled by the Chair when no urgent business required Board action, providing an appropriate balance between consistency and flexibility.

Following discussion, Dr. Seshaiyer called for a vote. The amendment was approved by a show of hands with all members present voting in favor and no opposition.

The Board then turned its attention to the proposed mission statement. Members reviewed several revisions and discussed how best to align the language with the Board's enabling legislation and statutory responsibilities.

Dr. Petersen suggested that the term "advocating" be reconsidered and proposed using the term "recommend" to better reflect the Board's advisory role. Members discussed the implications of various word choices and considered how the statement would be interpreted by stakeholders.

Ms. Sabarre encouraged the Board to ensure that the mission statement reflected key elements of the enabling legislation, including regional STEM ecosystems and hub-based collaboration. Ms. White emphasized the importance of equity, statewide access, and ensuring that STEM opportunities are available to learners throughout the Commonwealth.

Additional edits were made to grammar, punctuation, tense, and overall wording before a final version was presented for consideration.

The final mission statement adopted by the Board reads:

The Virginia STEM Advisory Board exists for the purpose of advocating programs and actions beneficial to high quality STEM education for K-12, college and university students throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Ms. Lin moved to approve the mission statement as amended and include it as an introduction to the bylaws. Ms. Thompson seconded the motion. Hearing no further discussion, Dr. Seshaiyer called for a vote. The motion passed by a show of hands with all members present voting in favor and none opposed.

Following adoption of the mission statement, Dr. Seshaiyer discussed opportunities to increase awareness of the Board's mission among cabinet members, legislators, and other state leaders. He expressed interest in introducing the Board and its work to key stakeholders throughout state government.

Dr. Seshaiyer also proposed developing an official Board letterhead that would include the names of Board members and could be used for correspondence with cabinet agencies and members of the General Assembly. Dr. Petersen noted that any official communications issued by the Board would require review and approval through the Governor's Office prior to distribution.

Due to time constraints and Ms. Salmon's absence, the SCHEV presentation was deferred to the next Board meeting.

Presentation from Virginia Works

Dr. Degenhardt, representing Virginia Works, provided an overview of workforce development initiatives, career pathway planning, grant opportunities, and emerging efforts related to artificial intelligence. She discussed strategies for aligning education and workforce systems with current and future industry needs through data-driven decision-making and collaboration with employers and subject matter experts.

- Virginia Works is focused on identifying, creating, and aligning career pathways that support workforce development from foundational learning through advanced industry expertise.
- Workforce planning efforts rely on engagement with employers and subject matter experts to ensure educational pathways remain aligned with current and future workforce demands.
- Data analysis and predictive workforce modeling are being used to identify existing workforce gaps and anticipate future needs.
- Virginia Works manages public and private grant opportunities that support workforce development initiatives, innovation, and strategic planning.
- The organization seeks to serve as both a provider and consumer of workforce services by collaborating with partners to develop solutions that address emerging challenges.
- Artificial intelligence is increasingly being integrated into workforce planning and development initiatives and is viewed as relevant across all industries and occupations.
- Current grant opportunities include STEM- and AI-focused initiatives, including opportunities supported through the National Science Foundation.
- Virginia Works is exploring the development of a statewide artificial intelligence resource hub that would connect students, educators, workforce organizations, and training providers with AI-related opportunities and resources.
- The proposed resource hub would create a centralized platform capable of expanding over time as additional partners, programs, and opportunities are added.

Dr. Degenhardt described her professional background as a neuroscience researcher and data analyst and noted that advancements in artificial intelligence represent a natural progression of developments in data analysis and computational capabilities. She emphasized that AI should not be viewed as a standalone industry but rather as a technology that increasingly influences every sector of the economy.

She explained that Virginia Works is working to identify opportunities where workforce development, education, and technology initiatives can be coordinated to better prepare Virginians for future careers. These efforts include pursuing grant funding, building partnerships, and engaging experts who can help identify emerging trends and future workforce needs.

Dr. Degenhardt highlighted opportunities available through STEM- and AI-focused grant programs and encouraged collaboration among organizations throughout the Commonwealth. She discussed the vision of creating a statewide AI resource hub that would provide centralized access to educational resources, workforce opportunities, networking connections, and information about AI-related initiatives occurring across Virginia.

Ms. Lin asked for additional information regarding a conference previously referenced by Ms. Overly and expressed interest in learning more about opportunities for collaboration and participation. Dr. Degenhardt provided additional context regarding the initiative and noted the value of continued engagement among stakeholders involved in workforce and education efforts.

Dr. Whipple asked whether Virginia Works would consider applications or participation from organizations located outside Virginia. Dr. Degenhardt explained that the initiative is primarily focused on supporting Virginia-based programs and organizations but noted that Virginia Works remains open to learning from successful models, best practices, and expertise developed in other states.

During the discussion, Dr. Seshaiyer clarified that the Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board does not serve as a fiscal agent and therefore is not positioned to directly administer grant funding. He noted, however, that the Board can play an important role in facilitating collaboration, providing strategic guidance, and connecting partners working toward common STEM education and workforce goals.

Virginia Department of Education Update

Dr. Petersen provided an update on initiatives underway within the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), including standards implementation, legislative priorities, instructional materials, educator support efforts, and STEM-related initiatives. She

highlighted several projects designed to strengthen educational outcomes while supporting workforce readiness and interdisciplinary learning opportunities across the Commonwealth.

- In her role as Director of STEM Education, Dr. Petersen oversees both the revision and implementation of academic standards and the implementation of education policy within VDOE.
- Current efforts are heavily focused on legislative requirements stemming from Executive Order 4 and related education initiatives.
- VDOE has collected recommendations and feedback from more than 2,000 stakeholders and organizations and is currently reviewing and synthesizing that information.
- Early implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act has produced positive outcomes and continues to be a major area of focus.
- VDOE is examining strategies to support teacher engagement, retention, and long-term success within the profession.
- The Department is developing its own strategic plan to guide future priorities and initiatives.
- An expanded mathematics task force has been established to assess the current state of mathematics education in Virginia and includes broad representation from multiple stakeholder groups.
- VDOE continues to advance the implementation of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) in mathematics and has begun similar efforts within science education.
- Work is underway to revise the 2020 Health Standards of Learning and prepare recommendations for consideration through the established review process.
- STEM initiatives are exploring effective approaches to integrating interdisciplinary instruction while maintaining manageable implementation expectations for educators.
- A grant focused on nuclear education is supporting efforts to expand professional development opportunities related to energy production and workforce needs in Virginia.
- VDOE continues to explore the role of microcredentials and other workforce-focused learning opportunities that support career readiness.
- The Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board webpage is active and includes the Board's mission statement and current membership information.

Dr. Petersen explained that VDOE's work currently centers on two primary areas: the implementation of academic standards and the implementation of policy initiatives established through legislation and executive actions. She noted that the Department is

actively processing a significant volume of stakeholder feedback received in response to Executive Order 4 and is working to identify common themes and recommendations.

She highlighted positive early results associated with the Virginia Literacy Act and emphasized the importance of supporting teachers as implementation efforts continue. Dr. Petersen noted that educator recruitment, engagement, and retention remain important considerations and that the Department is exploring strategies to encourage educators to remain in the profession.

Dr. Petersen discussed the expansion of the mathematics task force and explained that the group was intentionally structured to include diverse stakeholder representation. The task force is examining the current state of mathematics education in Virginia and identifying opportunities for improvement.

A significant focus of the Department's work involves High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Dr. Petersen reported that mathematics initiatives are already underway and that similar implementation efforts are beginning within science education. She emphasized the importance of providing educators with high-quality resources that support effective instruction and student achievement.

In discussing STEM education, Dr. Petersen noted that VDOE is exploring how integrated and interdisciplinary instruction can be implemented in meaningful ways. She stressed that integration should be intentional, manageable for educators, and aligned with instructional goals rather than being implemented solely to satisfy policy requirements. Efforts are underway to bring stakeholders together, identify opportunities for natural connections across disciplines, and make those connections more visible to teachers.

Dr. Petersen also provided an update on the revision of the 2020 Health Standards of Learning. She reported that proposed revisions are moving through the review process and that supporting documentation is being developed for future committee consideration.

The discussion included updates regarding a nuclear education grant that is supporting professional development related to energy production in Virginia. Dr. Petersen explained that existing educational resources are being updated to reflect current industry developments, including the growing interest in small modular reactor technologies and related career opportunities. She noted the importance of connecting students with emerging workforce pathways in high-demand industries.

Additional discussion focused on microcredentials and other approaches that can help students and educators build specialized knowledge aligned with workforce needs.

Dr. Petersen also informed the Board that the Virginia STEM Education Advisory Board webpage is active and includes information regarding the Board's mission, membership, and purpose.

Prior to the lunch recess, Dr. Seshaiyer provided a brief administrative update regarding Board resources and operations. He explained that the Board does not currently receive funding to support member travel, meals, or mileage reimbursement and thanked members for their continued participation and commitment despite those limitations.

Dr. Seshaiyer expressed appreciation to FIRST Chesapeake for sponsoring lunch and supporting the Board's meeting. Members joined in recognizing the organization's ongoing contributions to STEM education and workforce development efforts throughout the Commonwealth.

The Board recessed for lunch and later reconvened to continue the meeting agenda.

Regional STEM Ecosystem Update – Region 5

Ms. Sabarre provided an update on the development and progress of the Region 5 STEM Ecosystem centered in Harrisonburg. Her presentation highlighted regional collaboration efforts, partnership development, sustainability planning, workforce initiatives, and opportunities for future engagement across the Commonwealth.

- Ms. Sabarre reviewed the history of the STEM Ecosystem grant and the development of the Region 5 STEM Ecosystem initiative, with Harrisonburg serving as the regional hub.
- A regional needs assessment was completed to identify priorities, opportunities, and gaps across the region.
- The Region 5 STEM Ecosystem website was launched to support communication, collaboration, and resource sharing.
- A comprehensive Communications and Sustainability Plan was developed to guide long-term operations and growth.
- A regional newsletter was launched to share information about STEM programs, partnerships, resources, events, and summer learning opportunities.
- Three regional ecosystem meetings have been held since the Board's previous meeting.
- Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) were executed with Harrisonburg serving as the lead organization, and a formal scope of work was established for participating partners.
- Anchor partners include Siemens, Qualcomm, FIRST Chesapeake, Virginia Works, CodeVA, the Virginia Workforce Summit, and Battelle.

- The Region 5 STEM Ecosystem submitted an application for a \$50,000 National Science Foundation planning grant focused on artificial intelligence and workforce development.
- Sustainability planning efforts include a goal of securing approximately \$500,000 in additional funding to support future activities and expansion.
- Multiple regional events, professional learning opportunities, and partnership initiatives are planned throughout the coming year.

Ms. Sabarre explained that communication and collaboration remain central components of the Region 5 STEM Ecosystem strategy. She described efforts to strengthen regional connections through newsletters, meetings, digital resources, and partnerships that bring together educators, workforce organizations, businesses, and community stakeholders.

A significant portion of the discussion focused on the proposed National Science Foundation planning grant. Ms. Sabarre described a concept for an artificial intelligence-enabled resource platform that could help students identify educational opportunities, workforce pathways, and available resources based on their interests and needs.

Dr. Degenhardt noted that Virginia Works has been approached by vendors offering similar workforce navigation tools that utilize data analytics to help individuals identify career opportunities, educational requirements, and training pathways necessary to transition into new occupations. She explained that successful implementation of such tools would require significant cross-agency collaboration, data-sharing agreements, and supporting infrastructure.

Dr. Petersen referenced the existing Virginia Wizard platform as a potential point of reference for related efforts and emphasized the value of understanding existing resources before developing new systems.

Ms. Sabarre stressed that the success of any artificial intelligence tool depends on the quality of the information being provided to the system. She noted that the value lies not in the technology itself but in the accuracy, relevance, and completeness of the underlying resources and data.

Dr. Degenhardt agreed and emphasized the importance of collaboration and coordination among organizations. She stated that agencies should focus on building upon existing efforts rather than duplicating work and noted that partnerships are often more effective than independent initiatives.

Ms. Sabarre also discussed several upcoming programs and partnership opportunities. These included participation in an Emerging Technology Conference scheduled for November in Roanoke, collaboration with FIRST Chesapeake mentor training programs in Harrisonburg, regional STEMinars, and career and technical education events at Virginia Western Community College.

The Board received an update on plans to work with Siemens to develop an "Hour of Engineering" initiative targeted for February 2027. Ms. Sabarre explained that the project will adapt existing Siemens curriculum materials to align with Virginia Standards of Learning, support professional development opportunities for educators, and provide STEM activity kits for students.

Ms. Sabarre also reviewed the STEMinar calendar and upcoming professional learning opportunities available to educators throughout the Commonwealth.

During the discussion, Dr. Petersen emphasized the distinction between leadership-focused professional development and teacher-focused professional development. She also highlighted plans to continue Deeper Learning and STEM professional development opportunities for K–8 educators beginning in fall 2026.

Ms. Sabarre outlined several requests for support from Board members and partners, including:

- Assistance identifying new partnership opportunities and contacts.
- Sharing information about STEM-related events, programs, and initiatives throughout Virginia.
- Participation in a future STEMinar focused on healthcare careers and workforce pathways.
- Support for National Science Foundation grant opportunities, including NSF STEM Education and K–12 initiatives.

The discussion also included questions regarding professional development credentials. Dr. Seshaiyer asked how participants in STEM Ecosystem programs would receive continuing education recognition. Dr. Petersen responded that certificates of participation are often the most practical approach for many professional learning activities.

Dr. Petersen also cautioned members regarding the distinction between advocacy and recommendation activities. She noted that the Board's statutory role is advisory in nature and emphasized the importance of ensuring Board actions remain consistent with that responsibility.

Ms. Sabarre discussed the potential value of letters of support and noted that such endorsements can be important tools when pursuing grants and partnership opportunities.

Dr. Whipple commented on the importance of strengthening connections among STEM disciplines and asked whether there are opportunities to foster greater integration between mathematics, science, technology, and engineering education. Dr. Petersen responded that this objective is a key component of VDOE's instructional framework efforts. She explained that instructional guides increasingly highlight interdisciplinary connections and demonstrate how standards can align across subject areas while still allowing teachers flexibility in how they deliver instruction locally.

Dr. Seshaiyer asked whether Board members are permitted to engage in lobbying activities with members of the General Assembly. Mr. LaRiviere advised that restrictions apply and indicated that he would provide additional guidance regarding permissible activities at a later date.

Before concluding the presentation, Dr. Seshaiyer requested that future ecosystem updates include key performance indicators and measurable outcomes to help the Board assess progress. Board members were also encouraged to share STEM-related resources, opportunities, and partnerships with both VDOE and the Harrisonburg STEM Ecosystem.

Dr. Seshaiyer thanked Ms. Sabarre for the presentation and encouraged Board members to participate in upcoming STEM Ecosystem activities and events.

Virginia STEM Connect Activity and Strategic Planning Discussion

The Board participated in a collaborative strategic planning activity focused on identifying priorities and opportunities for advancing STEM education and workforce development across the Commonwealth. The exercise was designed to support future planning efforts and identify areas where the Board could provide recommendations to state leadership.

Dr. Seshaiyer facilitated the strategic planning exercise and asked members to consider how future Board activities could align with the recently adopted mission statement. Participants worked in small groups to identify ideas, opportunities, and challenges facing STEM education and workforce development in Virginia. Members then collaborated to organize similar concepts into broader categories that could inform future Board priorities.

Among the most frequently identified themes were career pathways, industry partnerships, workforce development, apprenticeship opportunities, and talent retention. Participants discussed strategies for reducing barriers to apprenticeships, supporting workforce upskilling efforts, and strengthening connections between education and employment.

Several members noted challenges associated with workforce recruitment and retention, particularly in highly competitive fields. Discussion included concerns regarding talent shortages, workforce preparedness, and the need to create stronger pathways that help Virginians access emerging career opportunities.

Dr. Whipple observed that Virginia possesses a significant but often underutilized pool of experienced educators, including retired teachers and veteran educators, who could potentially contribute to STEM education initiatives and workforce development efforts.

Dr. Seshaiyer emphasized the important role of Virginia's community colleges in supporting STEM education and workforce development. He described the community college system as a critical connector among secondary education, higher education, workforce training, and transfer pathways.

Building on the themes identified during the exercise, Dr. Seshaiyer proposed establishing three subcommittees aligned with the major priority areas that emerged from the discussion.

Ms. Lin asked for clarification regarding the purpose and expected responsibilities of the proposed subcommittees. Dr. Petersen explained that the groups would serve in an advisory capacity and would be responsible for developing recommendations that could be shared with the Secretary of Education and other state leaders.

Dr. Petersen further noted that one of the Board's most important responsibilities is to inform state leadership about STEM-related activities, challenges, and opportunities occurring throughout the Commonwealth. She suggested that concise briefing documents, such as one-page summaries or high-level slide presentations, could be effective tools for communicating key information to cabinet members and policymakers.

Board members discussed the organizational structure of the Secretariats and the importance of understanding how recommendations and information flow through state government. Participants agreed that concise, actionable summaries could help increase awareness of STEM initiatives and support informed decision-making.

SCHEV Overview

The Board also discussed the role of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and its contributions to higher education policy and planning.

Members noted that SCHEV serves as the Commonwealth's coordinating agency for higher education and is responsible for promoting the development of a coordinated, effective, and economically sound system of higher education across Virginia. The discussion reinforced the importance of maintaining strong connections between K–12 education, higher education, workforce development, and STEM initiatives.

Public Comment

Students attending the meeting shared observations and reflections regarding the Board's discussions and activities. They offered perspectives on STEM education, workforce opportunities, and the importance of creating pathways that support future learners and professionals.

Mr. Kline also provided remarks regarding his work in the consulting sector and discussed ways in which STEM education initiatives intersect with financial consulting and workforce development efforts.

Future Meeting Schedule

Following approval of the bylaws amendment increasing the number of annual meetings, Board members reviewed potential meeting dates and calendars for the remainder of the year.

Dr. Petersen recommended scheduling meetings on the last Friday of every other month when possible. The following dates were identified:

- **July 31, 2026** – Virtual Meeting, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- **October 2, 2026** – In-Person Meeting, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- **December 18, 2026** – Virtual Meeting, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Ms. White made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The second was called by Ms. Thompson. A vote was taken by show of hands, all approved. Motion carried.

There being no further business, Dr. Seshaiyer adjourned the meeting at **1:42 p.m.**