

November 7, 2025 -- SC Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Date: November 7, 2025; 10am - noon

Location: Winterset Junior/Senior High School

Present: Derry, Schultz, , Cox, Mathrubutham, Emerson, Luppert, Schellhorn, Neubauer, Corrigan, Bozer

Absent: Murphy, Cortz, Bruck, Byicza

Guests: Kacia Cain, Cat Lucht, Chad Sussex, Tony McCutchan, Cam Smith

- I. Derry kicked off meeting with introductions and thank-yous. The rest of the meeting involved a tour of Winterset's STEM programs, BEST award, and AI work. Please find a newsletter article below.
- II. Smith overviewed the junior and high school STEM efforts.
- III. McCutchan talked about physics day, AI, and externships
- IV. Cain talked about STEM BEST, dual credit classes and connecting with the community
- V. Lucht talked about her extern experience and authentic learning experiences
- VI. Smith talked about Winterset's AI Task Force
- VII. Room visits to McCutchan, Cain and Lucht
- VIII. Derry will send an email with information on upcoming meets and events.
- IX. Meeting adjourned at noon.

This article from the visit contained the following information and was published in the SC newsletter.

The SC Advisory Board visited Winterset Junior-Senior High School this month for their monthly meeting. Winterset is a one-stop school for folks wanting to see Iowa STEM programs in action. The visit focused on the following people:

Kacia Cain, the region's first STEM Teacher of the Year, hosted the visit. She teaches dual credit classes and has been a STEM BEST recipient two-times over. The visit also included **Cat Lucht**, STEM Extern; **Tony McCutchan**, STEM Extern and Physics Day at Adventureland coordinator; **Chad Sussex**, assistant principal and Winterset AI Taskforce leader; and **Cam Smith**, secondary principal.

Kacia Cain, Anatomy & Physiology

On the day we visited, Cain's class was studying sheep brains. She took us on a tour of her Anatomage Table, some of which was paid for via STEM BEST funds. The table is a 3D anatomy and dissection platform that uses an interactive touchscreen to allow users to explore virtual, life-sized cadavers. Students virtually dissect, rotate, and manipulate detailed 3D models based on real human scans. From her special-needs based class on The Human Body to her dual credit students in DMACC's Anatomy and Physiology, students benefit from the scientifically accurate tool.

Cat Lucht, Ninth Grade Physical Science

This past summer Lucht externed at Kemin Labs with the phytochemical team. She worked as an assistant to PhD researchers, competing tasks and analyzing data.

“It was great to see what their jobs look like,” said Lucht. “Lab experience in college is very different from career. I was able to bring real-world lab experiences back to my classes and help sift through what skills you need for college versus what skills you need in corporate.”

Lucht ensures her ninth grade physical science students get authentic learning experiences. This year, while studying Newton’s Laws, her students analyzed town driving habits and made suggestions to the city on how to make streets safer. She got the newest drivers in Winterset to consider traffic safety.

Tony McCutchan, Physics

A few years ago, McCutchan pitched the idea to Adventureland to host a Physics Day at the park. It would be a day of learning based on lessons plans and tools that helped students understand the STEM in rides. When new owners took over, McCutchan finally got his YES! The event will happen in April 2026, and they’re still taking requests from schools who would like to attend. It costs about \$20,000 for 500 students to engage in the day. If you’re a middle or high school teacher and would like to engage your students in hands-on physics, this day is perfect for you. Email McCutchan to begin a conversation.

This past summer, McCutchan also externed for Barilla in Ames. He learned the importance of teaching students to gather data and input them into spreadsheets for analysis. His class also integrates AI into data analysis. He says it’s essential for students to “make predictions before going to AI tools.” He also mentioned the importance of “checking and editing AI” information before incorporating elements into work.

Cam Smith & Chad Sussex, Administrators

All three teachers talked about how important it is to have supporting building administrators. Their principal, **Cam Smith**, said, “If it supports academic learning, we say yes whenever we can and then figure out how to pay for it.” Smith went on to say that every new idea goes smoothly. “If it doesn’t go great the first time, we’re okay with that. We want teachers to refine the experience and try it, again.” He likened it to making changes in a business: “You don’t close just because something didn’t work like you wanted.”

Business Day

Each year, Smith hosts Business Day, where community and business leaders come into the school. Each gets a table, and teachers rotate through the tables. Teachers learn what local organizations and businesses do and how they’d like to lend their expertise to classroom experiences.

Smith also schedules Personal PD Days, in which teachers work on their own or with others to bring their own ideas to fruition in the classroom. McCutchan used his days to work on plans for Physics Day at Adventureland.

Personal PD Days

In addition to Business Day and Personal PD Days, the school also secures Job Shadows for juniors and internship-type experiences for seniors. Smith notes that since they’ve incorporated more authentic learning experiences into classes, students’ standardized test scores have improved.

AI Task Force

Assistant Principal **Chad Sussex** created Winterset's AI Task Force. Across the state, the only two school districts who have public AI policies are Winterset and Iowa City. "We have to prepare students for AI," said Sussex, "or our kids will be at a disadvantage." Research backs this up. Pi 515's white paper found that 66 percent of all American businesses says they look for AI skills in new hires. (Request the entire resource here: .)

Sussex leads a team of 15 people who created the policy and vetting process for new AI tools. The team also leads district professional development experiences on AI, teaching teachers the best practices for writing prompts. They also subscribe to Magic School, an Open AI framework.

A Harvard study noted that thoughtful use of AI, like for lesson planning and the creation of visuals, can save teachers up to six hours a week. "This allows teachers to spend more time on student follow-up and feedback," noted Smith. He also referenced teacher burnout. "If AI allows a teacher to go golfing instead of working through the weekend, then it's worth exploring."

Even with increased use of AI, Sussex is sure it won't replace humans. "Right now, AI can't apply critical thinking skills. When it runs out of prompt, it can no longer be helpful. In addition, critical thinking skills must be applied when looking at AI results, checking for "accuracy, factual information, hallucinations, and bias." He also notes the importance of knowing what AI sourced to find the information. "Tools like Perplexity cite sources via AI."

To help share his work and best practices, Sussex has presented at state and local conferences, created an AI/ed consulting company, and wrote a book with co-author Sandy Groom-Meeks. The book is called *AI Express: Leading the Future of Learning*. It's available on Amazon.