

**NORTHWEST COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING**

May 11, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Ms. DENISE LAURSEN; Vice President/Secretary MR. R.J. KOST; Treasurer MR. BOB NEWSOME; Trustees MR. JOHN HOUSEL, MS. TARA KUIPERS, MR. SHANE OGDEN, and DR. MARK WURZEL.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: MS. LISA WATSON, President; MR. DAVE ERICKSON, Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. TOM HAVRON, Vice President for Student Services; MR. BURT REYNOLDS, Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance; MS. JILL ANDERSON; DR. LAUREL BALLARD, MS. JACQUE COBOURN, MR. DUSTIN DICKS, MS. TRACY GASAWAY, MR. MARK GRANT, MR. DENNIS QUILLEN, DR. GREG SMITH, MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO, MS. SHELBY WETZEL, MR. ZAC TAYLOR, *Powell Tribune*; and MS. KELI BORDERS, Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Trustees.

CALL TO ORDER: President Denise Laursen called the regular meeting of the Northwest College Board of Trustees to order on Monday, May 11, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

A APPROVE THE AGENDA: **A motion was made by Trustee Ogden, and seconded by Trustee Kost, to approve the agenda. Motion carried.**

A CONSENT AGENDA: **A motion was made by Trustee Wurzel, seconded by Trustee Newsome, to approve the consent agenda.**

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that most summer classes at Northwest College are online. Students tend to prefer the online option during the summer. Programs that require hands-on learning, such as the CDL and Electrical programs, continue to meet face-to-face. Students who stay in the residence halls are employed in summer positions at the College and may also be taking classes.

VP Reynolds reported that there are currently 110 students enrolled in summer classes, totaling 450 credit hours. One hundred students are enrolled in online courses, while ten are in face-to-face classes.

Trustee Housel recognized the Forensics team for their success at the Phi Rho Pi national tournament in Bethesda, Maryland, and especially the organization's creation of the Bob Becker Judging Award in honor of his years of service.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the annual performance evaluations are intended to foster a two-way conversation between employees and their supervisors. The form can be shared with Trustees. Faculty members conduct self-evaluations, which are then shared with their Division Chairs and the VP of Academic Affairs.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the College's student Art and Photography pieces purchased and added to the permanent collection are displayed throughout campus in offices and departments.

In response to Trustee Housel's appreciation of the DELTA program's partnership with Wyoming River Trips, Gradient Mountain Sports, and Wyoming Mountain Guides, President Watson stated that she is hopeful that once the new Interim Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Specialist begins their role, there will be an opportunity to expand connections with area businesses.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, VP Havron stated that he will work with Institutional Researcher Lisa Smith to pull individual program data to see enrollment in the bachelor programs and how it compares to previous years.

President Watson stated that, on the back of this year's Graduation program, students were congratulated and reminded that Northwest College offers "MORE" via a QR code linking to a landing page highlighting the BAS programs and the Bridge Grant.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that counseling use ebbs and flows over the years and that the cause is difficult to determine. The College has various programs in place to mitigate student problems, such as the Early Alert system and the recent Green Dot training program. Counselor Kim Fletcher also runs the Better Together program, which brings students together for a brown-bag lunch to foster new friendships and connections.

In response to Trustee Housel's statement that he appreciates the Foundation's efforts to help mitigate the financial burden caused by the recent tuition increase, President Watson stated that the Foundation continually supports the College and its students through scholarship fundraising as well as various campus initiatives.

Trustee Kuipers extended her appreciation to the Faculty Senate for conducting a survey to assess student needs regarding library hours. She noted that it's both refreshing and unsurprising that faculty address important issues in a research-oriented way.

Motion carried, and the consent agenda, including the minutes of the April 8, 2026, regular meeting, was approved.

**DISCUSSION/
INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

WCCC Discussion –
Laurel Ballard,
Executive Director

President Watson introduced Laurel Ballard, Executive Director of the Wyoming Community College Commission. Laurel has an extensive background with the Department of Education and has been with the Commission for two years, serving as the Chief Academic Officer before becoming the Executive Director. Laurel is traveling throughout the state to attend the community college graduations and attend Board meetings when possible to meet with Trustees.

Laurel expressed her appreciation for the invitation to attend commencement activities and the opportunity to engage directly with students, faculty, and the college community.

Laurel worked with the Department of Education for approximately eighteen years. After transitioning from K-12 to higher education, she recognized the differences and noted that the learning curve was much steeper than she expected, but one she has enjoyed.

Laurel shared an overview of the recent legislative session, including acknowledgment of the collaborative advocacy efforts of the Commission, WACCT, and the college presidents. There are many statewide initiatives and priorities affecting Wyoming's community colleges, and Laurel reported that approximately \$40 million in funding was added to community college budgets during the session, including support for dual enrollment programs.

The recent dual enrollment legislation provides reimbursement funding to K-12 districts for dual enrollment costs and removes course caps for participating students. Laurel stated that the legislation is expected to alleviate financial burdens previously carried by community colleges and improve educational access for students statewide.

Laurel stated there are still concerns regarding the impact of statewide property tax reductions on community college funding. Current estimates project revenue reductions of approximately \$18 million across the colleges, with potential increases to \$23 million should additional tax initiatives be passed. In response, the Commission and college presidents plan to conduct a comprehensive review of the community college funding model over the next 1 to 2 years. Areas of review will include the funding allocation model, the sustainability of current funding structures, the impacts of rural demographics, local revenue considerations, tuition, and the anticipated inclusion of Gillette College in the statewide funding model.

Laurel reported that the Commission will form a task force or subcommittee during its June meeting and plans to work with a consultant to guide the funding review process. Recommendations resulting from the review will inform future Legislative biennial budget work.

Laurel commended Wyoming community colleges for their amazing work in adult education and the wraparound services for students that help them succeed. She stated that Wyoming ranks among the top states nationally in several adult education performance measures. The success of Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs, which combine workforce training with adult education services, has resulted in significant wage increases for participating students.

The Commission is expected to pursue a supplemental budget request of approximately \$1 million to \$2 million to support the continuation and expansion of IET programs statewide, as existing federal ARPA funding that supplements these programs is scheduled to expire later this year.

Trustee Housel questioned whether there has been any discussion of revisiting the enrollment-based funding formula following the passage of House Bill 80 several years ago. At the time, there was an assumption that enrollment would continue to grow, but the current decline has negatively impacted the College.

Laurel stated that the community colleges have been fortunate that the Governor has not reduced enrollment-based funding in recent years. However, due to inflation, costs have increased, and the Commission plans to investigate what is and isn't working well and make recommendations after the funding review process.

President Laursen thanked Laurel for her time and for the discussion. She feels the Commission is doing a great job of listening to the needs of the community colleges and advocating for them.

Preliminary FY2027 Budget

VP Reynolds presented the FY2027 Preliminary Budget overview and directed the Trustees' attention to the chart in the memo included in the Board packet.

The projected increase in state appropriations of approximately \$970,000 is attributed primarily to three factors: legislative compensation funding, recapture redistribution funding, and an inflationary budget increase allocated by the State. VP Reynolds stated that the College is expected to receive

approximately \$772,000 annually from the statewide compensation allocation for community colleges over the biennium. In addition, the College anticipates receiving approximately \$108,000 through the recapture redistribution process, following a statewide decision by the colleges to delay collections and payments to stabilize the budget and improve forecasting of budget impacts. In addition, the Legislature appropriated an additional \$5 million statewide for inflationary and budgetary support; however, due to adjustments related to the enrollment-based funding formula, the college's net increase from that allocation is expected to be approximately \$90,000.

VP Reynolds reviewed local appropriation projections and stated that the budget remains conservative due to continued volatility in mineral extraction revenues and market conditions. Recent economic forecasts indicate anticipated declines in oil and gas production. Property tax revenues have remained generally consistent with prior projections despite the previously enacted 25% property tax reduction. VP Reynolds stated that the proposed statewide ballot initiative to provide additional property tax reductions will not affect the college until Fiscal Year 2028, should it pass. Slight increases in property valuations are anticipated; however, mineral-related revenues are projected to decline modestly, resulting in a relatively flat overall outlook for local appropriations.

VP Reynolds explained that the tuition increase will slightly increase revenue from WUE and out-of-state students; however, graduating class sizes are down in area high schools, which could affect enrollment and revenue. He stated that recent legislative changes expanded eligibility for dual enrollment opportunities to students in grades 9 through 12. Increased participation from homeschooled and younger students may contribute to future enrollment growth in dual coursework.

President Watson emphasized the importance of maintaining strong partnerships with local school districts and ensuring that the college remains the preferred provider of dual-enrollment instruction. The new funding structure for dual enrollment will hopefully cover the costs of K-12 students enrolled in college-taught courses. It will also better support instructors and program delivery as dual enrollment participation continues to expand.

Trustee Kuipers expressed her appreciation to VP Reynolds, Finance Director Grant, and President Watson for preparing a budget given the volatility at the local, state, and national levels. She feels that the conservative approach taken regarding the tuition increase and enrollment decline is especially wise.

President Watson stated that even with the projected enrollment cliff, there are opportunities with non-traditional students, BAS students, or increased credit loads that generate revenue. The College will continue to focus on marketing and enrollment efforts to maintain sound enrollment levels.

The majority of the increased state appropriations was provided for salary increases and employer costs. While it doesn't allow the creation of new or enhanced programs or positions, it supports the existing people of great value to the College, who support students in many ways. The College will provide either \$ 3,500 or 3.5%, whichever is greater, to all employees.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, VP Reynolds stated that if there were an unforeseen budget shortfall, the College would determine whether it could be absorbed using reserves or whether a further budget review is needed. The College has worked very hard to build and maintain its reserves to ensure it has flexibility during leaner times.

President and Board
FY2027 Budgets

VP Reynolds presented the President's and Board's FY2027 budgets and explained that, since the budget is expected to be flat, he recommends that the total dollar amounts remain unchanged. Adjustments were made to the expense categories to better align with where they are actually incurred.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the annual payment to the Wyoming Community College Trustees is paid for by the Foundation to ensure that the College's funds are not being utilized for lobbying activities.

Policy Review – 2100
Board Purpose and Role

Trustees reviewed Policy 2100 Board Purpose and Role. There were no suggested changes.

Renewal of President's Contract

President Laursen stated that she and President Watson would begin the annual review and renewal of the President's contract.

CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM

The Citizens' Open Forum convened at 5:00 p.m. No citizens requested to address the Board; therefore, the Citizens' Open Forum adjourned.

A UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There were no unfinished business items on the agenda.

A NEW BUSINESS:

There were no new business items on the agenda.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS FEEDBACK TO CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM TOPICS:

June 8, 2026, upcoming:

- Quarterly Budget Adjustments
- Accounts Receivable write-offs
- Powell Valley Community Ed (PVCE) contract for services renewal
- Preliminary Budget
- BOCES Budgets for Greybull, Lovell, and Powell
- Adult Education presentation
- 2027 Board Goals and President's Goals
- Other TBD

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Summer Classes Begin, June 1, 2026, NWC
WCCC meeting, June 4-5, 2026, Sheridan College
June Board meeting, June 8, 2026, 4:00 p.m., Yellowstone Building
Yellowstone Summer Music Camp, June 14-19, 2026, NPA
College National Finals Rodeo, June 14-20, 2026, Casper

A ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 5:16 p.m.

R.J. KOST, Vice President/Secretary

Date