

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

August 10, 2026

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: MS. TARA KUIPERS

OTHERS PRESENT: MS. LISA WATSON, President; MR. DAVE ERICKSON, Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. BURT REYNOLDS, Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance; MS. JILL ANDERSON, MS. JACQUE COBURN, MR. DUSTIN DICKS, MS. CALLEE ERICKSON, MS. TRACY GASAWAY, MS. KORI JORDAN, MR. RYAN MANGUS, MR. DENNIS QUILLEN, MS. LISA SMITH, MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO, MS. SHELBY WETZEL, MR. LOGAN STAYTON, *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, August 10, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

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

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

In response to a question about the check register, President Watson stated that the payment to Signature Research Inc. is for the construction down payment for the new aerial ropes course to be installed by the Soccer Fieldhouse, as well as for the replacement of the Field Camp ropes course, which has reached end of life. The WIP grant is funding these projects.

In response to a question related to the check register, President Watson stated that the College has a purchasing policy that states that “Purchases must be made by authorized personnel only. The College shall not be obligated for any purchase made without proper approval. Whenever the College lets a contract, appropriate state and federal laws, including Wyoming’s in-state contractor Preference Act, must be followed.”

President Watson stated that approximately 80% of the College’s budget is for salaries, of which almost 100% of those dollars stay within the Big Horn Basin. The College purchases locally when possible, such as at hardware and grocery stores, keeping money in the service district; however, some items cannot be purchased locally, such as software agreements.

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

**DISCUSSION/
INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

GEAR UP President Watson introduced Callee Erickson, GEAR UP Coordinator, and Kori Jordan, GEAR UP Specialist. Callee will present on the GEAR UP program, a grant-funded initiative operated at Northwest College.

Callee stated that GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness Readiness and Undergraduate Programs) focuses on supporting low-income families and

students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and are in 7th through 12th grade. GEAR UP serves its students through their first year of college. The program helps them overcome barriers and realize that college is a possibility for them, whether at a traditional college or a tech school.

GEAR UP is a federally funded grant program administered by the U.S. Department of Education. At the state level, the grant is housed at the University of Wyoming, in partnership with each of Wyoming's community colleges. GEAR UP Wyoming (GUWY) operates on a 7-year grant cycle. The program is currently entering the third year of its fourth consecutive grant cycle since inception in 1999.

GUWY is required to serve a minimum of 2,000 students per year, and Northwest College's site must serve a minimum of 200 students per year. On average, Northwest College's GEAR UP site serves 230-260 students per year within the allocated budget.

GUWY receives just over \$4 million annually from the Department of Education, and an additional \$4 million comes from in-kind and scholarship contributions. The grant structure requires a dollar-for-dollar institutional match. For the current fiscal period, the Northwest College site was required to provide a baseline match of \$219,000. The College has significantly exceeded its regulatory matching threshold, currently tracking \$224,942 in match contributions. The surplus can be attributed to strong allocations of institutional and non-institutional scholarship and travel matches. Generating an operational surplus helps safeguard the state's compliance if other regional college sites experience matching shortfalls.

Callee listed the mandatory performance objectives as follows:

- Objective 1 – Maintain a minimum of 2,000 active participants (NWC must maintain 200 active participants).
- Objective 2 – Ensure that at least 50% of GUWY high school graduates qualify for a non-provisional Hathaway Scholarship.
- Objective 3 – Achieve a minimum graduation rate of 85% among GUWY high school seniors.
- Objective 4 – Ensure that at least 50% of high school graduates successfully enroll in higher education by the fall semester immediately following graduation.
- Objective 5 – Achieve a 60% persistence rate from Year 1 to Year 2 for participants enrolled in higher education who did not complete a degree or certificate within their first year.
- Objective 6 – 65% of GUWY 12th grade participants will complete the FAFSA.
- Objective 7 – 80% of high school senior participants who complete the GUWY annual survey will be confident in their ability to pay for or finance postsecondary education.
- Objective 8 – Ensure that 45% of active GEAR UP parents or guardians participate in workshops designed to assist families in understanding and obtaining institutional scholarships and federal financial aid.

- Subgoals and grant priorities – the new grant cycle lists explicit priority points aimed at reducing the need for remedial education for post-secondary students and mitigating “summer melt,” which is when high school graduates fail to matriculate into college in the fall. GEAR UP staff stay in touch with students throughout the summer and assist with missing paperwork, such as financial aid and housing documentation, to help bridge the transition.

Callee stated that in year one of this grant cycle, the Northwest College GEAR UP site was the only site in the state to complete all eight objectives and is on track to meet them again in the second year.

The Northwest College GEAR UP site serves over fifteen schools in three counties. Callee and Jordan work in the College’s GEAR UP office on campus and work with nine liaisons who visit regional middle and high schools monthly to conduct student mentoring and academic workshops.

GEAR UP hosts monthly events during the school year that offer a variety of skill sets and lesson plans, such as SMART Goals, test-taking strategies, study strategies, college degree options, resume building, how to write a paper, Financial Aid, and college readiness, among many others.

Callee shared a financial impact model from the University of Wyoming that projects the College’s revenues from GEAR UP student enrollment over the 7-year grant cycle. The data models demonstrate that incoming cohorts generate significant revenue for NWC through direct tuition, room and board, and state funding matches.

Callee shared brochures that explain the program further and include a QR code linking to the Facebook and Instagram pages, where all events, happenings, and available scholarships are listed for students.

Residence Life Master Plan

President Watson stated that the Board reviews the Residence Life Master Plan every even year, which was created in 2020. The Plan was built to be flexible, considering both current and future needs.

President Watson noted that the Plan called for renovation of the Trapper Main Apartments, which has been completed. The roofs still need to be replaced as the needs arise, and the College plans to enhance internet access to enable heating and security control.

The Plan also calls for continued investment in Ashley Hall. The College has updated the lounge areas and is committed to further renovations as resources allow.

Previously, the College pulled back the dirt around Ashley Hall and sealed the foundation to prevent future mold issues. Since then, improvements and updates have been made to the lounge and lobby areas, including a boiler replacement and a variety of other updates. The lighting has not been replaced and will need to be at some point.

President Watson noted that occupancy rates have not changed much over the last few years. She referred to a graph that describes the inventory of buildings and the number of beds in each. She reminded Trustees that when Cody Hall had the mold issue, the College determined that the investment to remodel and reopen the Hall was greater than the need based on current and projected future occupancy levels.

The College has been following the Residence Hall maintenance timeline document, which lists all buildings and their respective schedule of priorities. For instance, in 2021, the lighting in Simpson Hall was replaced, with a seven-year refresh to begin in 2025-26. As discussed in Facilities Committee meetings, painting, flooring, and furniture upgrades have begun in the hall.

President Watson stated that at Trapper West, 32 units are rented by employees, 13 by students, and 4 are used as flex space, such as for CDL or nursing students. Five units are available to rent.

President Watson reminded Trustees that the College pays for any improvements or repairs made to auxiliary spaces, which include the residence Halls and apartments. The state does not provide funding for auxiliary buildings. The College must remain strategic in planning and prioritizing its investment in these spaces, while remaining committed to continuous improvement.

In response to a question from Trustee Ogden, President Watson stated that approximately 350 students, which is 25% of the total student population, reside on campus.

In response to a question from Trustee Wurzel, President Watson said the Residence Life Master Plan includes short, medium, and long-term goals. The College completed one of the short-term goals, renovating Trapper Main apartments, but held off on the other three. While the administration discussed these goals, it decided against pursuing them for various reasons. For instance, the College chose not to divest itself from Trapper Village West immediately, and it continues to be rented out. Also, without the funding from the sale of Trapper West, the College lacked the resources to demolish Cody Hall. However, the College renovated Trapper Main in-house, achieving considerable cost savings. The Residence Life Master Plan has been very helpful in guiding the conversations and prioritizing work with available resources.

As a reminder, President Watson stated that the College worked with Scion when developing the Plan because Scion rents a tremendous number of halls to colleges across the nation and knows the business model. They understand the occupancy levels required to keep a building self-supporting in terms of deferred maintenance and operating costs. However, the College must also consider the whole picture in terms of what, why, and where it wants to be 50 to 100 years from now.

Big Horn Basin High School Report

Lisa Smith stated that the Big Horn Basin High School Report summarizes student enrollment from the College's service-area high schools for students who enrolled at NWC during the academic year following high school graduation. Because the area high schools are small, a three-year average is examined to eliminate potential year-to-year variability.

Over the past three years, 550 students graduated annually from all the Big Horn Basin High Schools. Of those, 21% (116) enrolled at Northwest College the following year. Also, of those 550 graduates, 15% had both enrolled at Northwest College and been concurrently or dual-enrolled.

Meeteetse, Lovell, and Powell had the highest percentages of their graduates enrolling at Northwest College, while Riverside, Worland, and Ten Sleep had the lowest.

Of the Northwest College concurrent or dual enrolled students who graduated

high school in 2025 and attended post-secondary education within one year of graduation, 21% attended Northwest College; 13% attended the University of Wyoming; 13% attended an out-of-state institution; 9% attended another Wyoming community college; and 43% have no record of subsequent post-secondary education. Historically, the group that has no record of post-secondary education enrolls at a college or university after the first year following graduation.

Trustee Housel expressed concern about the percentage decrease in the number of Cody graduates attending Northwest College over the years. President Watson stated that the number of graduates from all schools attending Northwest College has decreased, but the number of dual and concurrent students has increased. Students may be earning more credits while still in high school and then attending four-year schools immediately after graduating. The decrease from Cody could also be attributed to using AP credit or their commitment to project-based learning. She and Ty Flock will attend area school Board meetings this fall as part of the College's commitment to building relationships with area schools. VPAA Dave Erickson will also meet with all the principals.

Annual Contract Review

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the College leases out underutilized space to State agencies displaced after losing their leases at another building. The Department of Education is leasing space in Frisby, and the State Engineers, ETS, and the Department of Revenue are in FAB Annex.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the College's undeveloped farmland was leased to Churchill Farms for many years until their retirement. Stutzman Farms has now been leasing the land for two years.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that as part of the College's strategic work, it contracted with Hanover Research for two ongoing streams of support to conduct multiple surveys and research. The contract expires at the end of this year. The College has received reports when certain research has been completed, and there will likely be a capstone report at the end of the contract period.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that Maxient is the software used to track all student incidents, including Title IX reporting.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the current contract with Sodexo stipulates that the College collects money from the students for meal plans, then pays Sodexo for the cost of operations, plus \$10,000. A new contract is pending.

Citizens' Open Forum Procedure

Trustees reviewed the established Citizens' Open Forum Guidelines and did not wish to make any changes.

Policy Review – 2130 Board Communications

Trustee Ogden stated that the Policy is based on statute. He noted that there is discussion at the state level about educating the public about the difference between a public meeting (i.e., a Board meeting) and a meeting held in public and wondered whether that should be defined.

President Watson stated that she will monitor the Legislative Session to see whether new legislation may affect the Policy.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that she will research whether the College defines electronic communication elsewhere in its policies. Trustee Kost stated that “Skype” should be stricken as an example of electronic communication, since it is a specific company name. Trustee Ogden suggested the Board Policy Committee could review the policy and then bring recommendations to the Board.

Schedule Fall Board Retreat

President Watson stated that a Doodle Poll will be created to find a date for the Fall Board Retreat that works for everyone’s schedule.

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:**

September 14, 2026, upcoming:

- Host campus open house
- New employee introduction
- Quarterly budget adjustments
- Employee satisfaction/PACE results
- Course/lab fee proposals (for Spring)
- Reserve overview
- Budget Adjustments
- President’s Operational Plan update
- Policy Review – Policy 2140 Board Policy Development
- Distribute Board self-assessment (to complete for Retreat)
- Distribute President’s evaluation (to be completed for Retreat)
- Other TBD

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

New Faculty Orientation, August 20-21, 2026, Main Campus
Kick-Off Weekend, August 22-25, 2026, Main Campus
State of the College Address, August 24, 2026, 8:30 a.m., Yellowstone Bldg.
First Day of Fall classes, August 26, 2026, NWC
WCCC Commission meeting (special), August 21, 2026, Riverton
Paint the Town Red, August 28, 2026, 4:00 p.m., Powell
4th Annual Run for Berry, August 29, 2026, Campus Mall
Next Board meeting, September 14, 2026, 4:00 p.m., Yellowstone Bldg.
WCCC meeting October 8-9, 2026, 8:30 a.m., Rock Springs

A ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 5:46 p.m.

R.J. KOST, Vice President/Secretary

Date