February 11, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Chair Blake Benson at 1:17 p.m. on Wednesday, February 11, 2026. The meeting was held at the Board office, Curtis State Office Building, 1000 SW Jackson, Ste. 520, Topeka, Kansas. Proper notice was given according to the law.

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Blake Benson, Chair	John Dicus	Neelima Parasker
	Diana Mendoza, Vice Chair	Matt Crocker	Kathy Wolfe Moore
	Alysia Johnston	Pamela Ammar	

Chair Benson announced a modification to the discussion agenda to include a legislative update.

Approval of Minutes

Regent Crocker moved to approve the minutes of the Board's January 14, 2026, meeting and January 29, 2026, special meeting. Regent Mendoza seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Introductions and Reports

Report from the Chair

Chair Benson congratulated President Flanders on his announced retirement and recognized his decades of service to higher education in Kansas. He highlighted President Flanders' leadership in developing and implementing the Board's strategic plan and credited him with strengthening the state's higher education system for future generations. Chair Benson also noted the ongoing legislative session and that the Board was hosting a reception with legislators that evening to highlight the impact of higher education on Kansas families, businesses, and students, reaffirming the Board's commitment to a strong partnership with the Legislature.

Report from the President & CEO

President Flanders reported that Kansas was selected to participate in two national initiatives that advance access and student success. He announced the state's participation in the Fair Chance to Advance initiative through Jobs for the Future, led by the Kansas Department of Corrections, and highlighted the involvement of Kansas colleges in providing education within the corrections system. He emphasized the importance of removing systemic barriers and intentionally connecting education to employment to reduce recidivism. President Flanders also noted Kansas' selection for the Holistic Advising for Student Success initiative led by the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, attributing the opportunity to the strong student success efforts across institutions. He stated that the Board will form teams from two- and four-year institutions to participate in the initiative.

Report from Council of Faculty Senate Presidents

Rochelle Rowley, Faculty Senate President at ESU, reported that the International Baccalaureate program review is nearing completion and has not generated any recommendations for revisions. She noted that all institutions remain on track to submit Faculty of the Year nominations by the May 15 deadline. President Rowley also stated that the Council continues to monitor legislative developments and their potential impact on faculty protections and academic freedom. She concluded by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the Board and noting anticipation for the upcoming breakfast with Regents.

Report from Students' Advisory Committee

Azwad Zahraan, Student Advisory Committee Chair, reported that student representatives visited the Kansas State Capitol on February 4, where they met with legislators to share student perspectives and gain insight into

the legislative process, including observing committee deliberations. He noted that the experience strengthened student understanding of policymaking and advocacy. Looking ahead, Mr. Zahraan stated that the Committee discussed upcoming student fee considerations and plans to collaborate with chief financial officers, university presidents, and campus leaders to better understand the issues and convey student feedback.

Standing Committee Reports

Academic Affairs

Regent Johnston reported that the Board Academic Affairs Standing Committee met virtually on January 27 and reviewed a new program proposal from Fort Hays State University for a Bachelor of Science in Financial Forensics and Fraud Investigation, which the committee approved for placement on the Board's consent agenda. She also noted that a consultant report on Kansas Apply Free Days recommended designating October 5–9, 2026, as Apply Free Days for Academic Year 2027, expanding the initiative from three to five days, with the recommendation scheduled for Board discussion. Regent Johnston further explained that proposed amendments to the Spoken English Language Competency Policy were reviewed to reflect changes in test scoring and placed on the discussion agenda. She reported that the committee approved the scoring rubric for the AY 2026 Performance Report, marking the final year of the current performance agreements, and stated that Academic Affairs will begin developing the next set of agreements, including consideration of a one-year bridge agreement to support data-informed planning. She concluded by highlighting updates on ongoing academic affairs work, including the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association's Holistic Advising for Student Success initiative, which will strengthen advising and cross-sector collaboration in support of student success and access.

Fiscal Affairs & Audit

Regent Dicus reported that the committee held an agenda call on January 28 and met earlier that day, focusing on potential improvements to the management of university capital projects to increase efficiency and reduce repeated reviews of long-term projects. He noted that the committee received the required external management review of Pittsburg State University following a leadership transition, which produced positive findings. Regent Dicus also highlighted a presentation on the Composite Financial Index, explaining its calculation and significance for assessing university financial health. The committee reviewed annual financial reports, including composite index results and current-year budget status, from Pittsburg State University, Fort Hays State University, and Emporia State University, with remaining institutions scheduled for the March meeting. He concluded by noting that the committee reviewed items on the discussion agenda, including student health plan benefits and rates, heard input from both university financial leadership and student representatives, and received an update on the state budget process.

Governance

Chair Benson reported that the committee received the annual campus safety, security, and IT reports from the University of Kansas and the University of Kansas Medical Center, with particular focus on heightened planning and preparedness related to the upcoming World Cup in the Kansas City region and its expected impact on surrounding communities, including Lawrence. Chair Benson emphasized that both campuses demonstrated thorough planning and strong execution to manage increased demands, and he expressed appreciation for their efforts to ensure the safety of visitors, participants, and campus communities while positioning the region positively for the global exposure associated with the event.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Regent Johnston moved to approve the consent agenda. Regent Ammar seconded the motion. The motion carried and the following items were approved:

Academic Affairs

Act on Request to Approve BS in Financial Forensics & Fraud Investigation, FHSU

Fort Hays State University received approval to offer a 120-credit-hour Bachelor of Science in Forensics and Fraud Investigation.

Receive Annual Institutional Review for the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, KUMC

The Board accepted the Annual Institutional Review for the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education from the University of Kansas Medical Center.

Fiscal Affairs & Audit

Act on Request to Amend the Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Improvement Plan and Approve Program Statement for Chiller Building #1 Restoration, KU

The University of Kansas received approval to amend the Fiscal Year 2026 capital improvement project plan, and the Board accepted the program statement for the Chiller Building #1 Restoration.

Act on Request to Amend the Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Improvement Plan and Approve Program Statement for Chiller Expansion Project, KSU

Kansas State University received approval to amend the Fiscal Year 2026 capital improvement project plan, and the Board accepted the program statement for the Chiller Expansion Project.

Act on Request to Allocate EPSCoR Appropriation - System

The Board approved the allocation of $300,000 for the EPSCoR Program awards.

Act on Kansas Comprehensive Grant Program Distributions - System

The Board approved the distribution of returned FY 2025 funds for the Kansas Comprehensive Grant.

Kansas Comprehensive Grant Program – FY 2026, Revised					
	Original Allocation	**FY 2024 Unmatched KCG**	**Subtotal**	**FY 2025 Unmatched KCG**	**New FY 2026 Total**
Baker University	$2,232,209	$10,413	$2,242,622	$23,635	$2,266,257
Barclay College	$170,397	$795	$171,192	$1,804	$172,996
Benedictine College	$1,133,144	$5,286	$1,138,430	$11,998	$1,150,428
Bethany College	$1,171,620	$5,465	$1,177,085	$12,405	$1,189,490
Bethel College	$894,587	$4,173	$898,760	$9,472	$908,232
Central Christian College	$551,836	$0	$551,836	$5,816	$557,652
Cleveland University of KC	$136,319	$0	$136,319	$1,438	$137,757
Donnelly College	$496,337	$2,315	$498,652	$5,255	$503,907
Friends University	$1,840,294	$8,585	$1,848,879	$19,486	$1,868,365
Hesston College	$350,571	$1,635	$352,206	$3,712	$355,918
Kansas Wesleyan University	$1,397,261	$6,518	$1,403,779	$14,795	$1,418,574
Manhattan Christian College	$315,236	$1,471	$316,707	$0	$316,707
McPherson College	$826,429	$3,855	$830,284	$8,750	$839,034
MidAmerica Nazarene University	$1,273,721	$5,942	$1,279,663	$13,487	$1,293,150
Newman University	$2,151,270	$10,035	$2,161,305	$22,778	$2,184,083
Ottawa University	$1,121,994	$0	$1,121,994	$0	$1,121,994

University of Saint Mary	$1,329,101	$6,200	$1,335,301	$14,073	$1,349,374
Southwestern College	$1,079,727	$5,037	$1,084,764	$11,432	$1,096,196
Sterling College	$877,547	$4,094	$881,641	$9,292	$890,933
Tabor College	$779,569	$3,637	$783,206	$8,254	$791,460
Private Institutions' Total	**$20,129,169**	**$85,456**	**$20,214,625**	**$197,882**	**$20,412,507**
Emporia State University	$1,258,419	$5,342	$1,263,761	$12,371	$1,276,132
Fort Hays State University	$2,937,762	$12,472	$2,950,234	$28,880	$2,979,114
Kansas State University	$4,310,834	$18,301	$4,329,135	$42,377	$4,371,512
Pittsburg State University	$1,715,597	$7,283	$1,722,880	$16,865	$1,739,745
University of Kansas	$4,292,280	$18,222	$4,310,502	$42,196	$4,352,698
KU Medical Center *	$59,906	$254	$60,160	$589	$60,749
Wichita State University	$4,056,815	$17,223	$4,074,038	$39,881	$4,113,919
Washburn University	$1,497,556	$6,358	$1,503,914	$14,722	$1,518,636
Public Universities' Total	**$20,129,169**	**$85,455**	**$20,214,624**	**$197,881**	**$20,412,505**
Total State Funding	**$40,258,338**	**$170,911**	**$40,429,249**	**$395,763**	**$40,825,012**

Technical Education Authority

Act on Program Proposals for AAS in Heavy Equipment Operation and an AAS in Masonry, WSU Tech

Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology received approval to offer a 35-credit-hour Technical Certificate and 60-credit-hour Associate of Applied Science in Heavy Equipment Operation, and a 38-credit-hour Technical Certificate and 60-credit-hour Associate of Applied Sciences in Masonry Construction.

Act on New Promise Act Programs

Wichita State University Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology received approval for Promise Act eligible programs Heavy Equipment Operation (49.0202) and Masonry Construction (46.0101).

Act on Academic Year 2027 Excel in Career Technical Education Fees

The Board approved the Academic Year 2027 Excel in Career Technical Education fees charged to high school students.

(list on file with official minutes)

Act on Updates to Excel in Career Technical Education Eligibility

The Board approved the recommended updates to eligibility for state funding in the Excel in Career Technical Education program.

Consideration of Discussion Agenda

Academic Affairs

Act on Proposed Amendments to Spoken English Language Competency Policy

Jenn Bonds-Raacke, Vice President of Academic Affairs, presented proposed amendments to the Spoken English Language Competency Policy to align with recent changes to the Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Test (TOEFL iBT) examination. She explained that Board policy requires assessment of spoken English proficiency for prospective faculty and graduate teaching assistants whose native language is not English and outlined the existing criteria for appointment without remediation. She reported that revisions to the TOEFL iBT, effective January 2026, changed the speaking score scale from 1–30 to 1–6, prompting KU to evaluate the new

scoring methodology. Based on that analysis, KU recommended establishing a minimum speaking score of 4.5, which is comparable to the prior benchmark. Vice President Bonds-Raacke noted that the proposed policy updates also allow applicants who took the exam before the change to retain their valid scores for the full two-year period, avoiding unnecessary retesting.

Regent Johnston moved to approve the amendments to the Spoken English Language Competency policy. Regent Parasker seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Receive Report on Kansas Free Application Days

Mistie Knox, Board Consultant, presented an overview of the Kansas Apply Free Days initiative, highlighting its outcomes and proposed next steps. She explained that the program, now in its third year of a pilot phase, waives undergraduate application fees for Kansas residents during a designated fall window and represents a significant institutional investment. Mrs. Knox reported that nearly $296,000 in application fees were waived during the three-day Apply Free Days period in Academic Year 2026 and noted that, while overall yield rates were lower than applications submitted outside the window, the initiative effectively reached key populations, including adult learners, first generation students, and individuals who had not previously planned to apply to college. She emphasized that feedback from counselors and students indicated the program reduced perceived barriers, created urgency, and supported application completion through coordinated school-based efforts.

(presentation on file with official minutes)

Act on Kansas Free Application Days (Academic Year 2027)

Mrs. Knox presented a recommendation for extending Apply Free Days from three to five consecutive days in October and using the upcoming year as the final pilot year to support informed decisions about the program's future.

Vice Chair Mendoza moved to approve the Kansas Free Application Days for Academic Year 2027, to be held on October 5-9, 2026. Regent Parasker seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Fiscal Affairs & Audit

Act on Student Health Insurance Benefits and Rates for Plan Year 2026-2027

David Miller, Student Insurance Advisory Committee Chair, presented a recommendation to approve student health insurance benefits and rates for the 2026–2027 plan year. He explained that the Board has held statutory authority since 2006 to contract for voluntary student health insurance and that the current contract with UnitedHealth Student Resources, awarded in 2020, spans ten years with termination provisions. Representing all six state universities and the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC), the advisory committee unanimously recommended modest premium increases of 3.21% for Plan 1 and 3.23% for Plans 2, 3, and 4. Mr. Miller noted that rate negotiations began later than usual due to UnitedHealth's analysis of international enrollment impacts, moderate increases in claim activity, and a 6% rate reduction granted in the prior policy year. He also highlighted the committee's recommendation to include HealthiestYou by Teladoc—a 24/7 virtual care and telehealth benefit—at no additional cost to students.

Regent Dicus moved to approve the Student Health Insurance Benefits and Rates for Plan Year 2026-2027. Regent Crocker seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Strategic Plan

Receive Annual Report on the Board's Strategic Plan, Building a Future

President Flanders presented the annual report on the Board's strategic plan, *Building a Future*, highlighting progress and key challenges facing Kansas higher education. He emphasized that a strong postsecondary system is essential to the state's economic competitiveness amid persistent labor shortages and demographic headwinds. President Flanders emphasized the value of education beyond high school in improving wages, job security, and broader social outcomes, while stressing that degrees must lead to family-sustaining employment.

He reported continued success in affordability and student support strategies, including restrained tuition growth, expanded need-based aid, and systemwide adoption of evidence-based student success practices. Since 2020, student loan debt among Pell recipients at state universities has declined by 15%, and a significant share of students graduate with no debt. President Flanders noted that demand for need-based aid exceeds available funding and warned that reductions—particularly to flexible "emergency aid"—would negatively affect retention and on-time graduation for low-income students.

President Flanders addressed enrollment trends shaped by the long-term "enrollment cliff," noting stabilization and growth at some institutions, continued gains at technical colleges, and persistent declines at community colleges. He called for intensified out-of-state recruitment and stronger applied learning and internship opportunities to build and retain the Kansas workforce, citing improved retention of nonresident graduates. He also highlighted strong outcomes in graduates' employment and wages, the success of the system's engineering initiative, growth in Excel in CTE participation, and expanding research and development activity that supports innovation and economic development statewide.

Finally, President Flanders reaffirmed priorities in literacy, facilities renewal, and intentional economic development. He described progress on the Blueprint for Literacy, alignment of educator preparation with the science of reading, and the effectiveness of the facilities initiative in reducing deferred maintenance. He concluded by noting the importance of stable, targeted investments and refined metrics to sustain progress and ensure higher education continues to advance prosperity for Kansas and its communities.

(presentation on file with official minutes)

Other Matters

Receive Pillar III University Reports

Chair Benson shared that the Pillar 3 reports were rescheduled and will be accompanied by a presentation from the Lieutenant Governor at the March Board meeting.

Act on Request to Name Spaces, KSU

President Linton presented a request to name three spaces associated with the university's Agricultural Innovation Initiative, emphasizing that such requests reflect both project progress and the vital role of philanthropic support. He explained that the initiative represents a $210 million, multi-phase project involving renovations, demolitions, and the construction of new facilities. President Linton highlighted the proposed naming of the Western Star Global Grain and Food Center, an interdisciplinary science facility integrating grain, food, animal, dairy, and baking sciences, jointly supported by the Hale and Vanier families; an adjacent outdoor plaza recognizing the Kruse family for their long-standing support of agriculture students and programs; and a complex of buildings supporting the Agronomy Research Farm, funded by alumnus Eldon Gideon.

Regent Dicus moved to approve the naming of the Western Star Global Grain and Food Center, Kruse Family Plaza, and the Eldon Gideon Agronomy Research and Innovation Complex. Regent Johnston seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Legislative Update

Kelly Oliver, Chief of Staff, provided a legislative update. She noted the Legislature was approximately one-third through the session and approaching turnaround, the point at which most bills must advance from their chamber of origin to remain viable. She highlighted several bills affecting higher education, including House Bill 2428 related to DEI and curriculum requirements; House Bill 2485, a Board-supported measure addressing scholarship repayment obligations, which has advanced to the House floor; and House Bill 2487, concerning the Kansas Education Opportunity Scholarship, which passed the House unanimously and will move to the Senate. Chief of Staff Oliver also summarized activity on bills related to institutional affiliations, faculty tenure, Promise Act Scholarship restrictions on co-requisite coursework, and Workforce Pell, emphasizing the volume and pace of legislative activity.

Elaine Frisbie, Vice President for Finance and Administration, followed with a budget update, comparing the Board's requests with current House and Senate positions. She reported a proposed $2.3 million reduction in need-based aid, lowering funding from approximately $24 million to $21 million and potentially affecting more than 1,100 students, particularly through the loss of flexible awards that help close small financial gaps. Vice President Frisbie noted agreement in both chambers to fully fund the rolling three-year average for community and technical college course reimbursements, though a planned $10 million reduction next year would affect payments to colleges for Excel in CTE courses. She outlined differences between chambers on student success initiative funding, Blueprint for Literacy appropriations, and energy project support. She also discussed House-only operating reductions for state universities and several policy provisos tied to DEI certifications to tenured faculty on improvement plans, and a proposed tuition freeze for the state universities. Vice President Frisbie concluded by emphasizing that funding levels and budget language remain fluid as negotiations continue.

Adjournment

Chair Benson adjourned the meeting at 3:04 p.m.

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Blake Flanders, President and CEO Blake Benson, Chair