

**WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE AREA
BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

**SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES**

**Wednesday, February 18, 2026
10:30 a.m.**

The Western Community College Area Board of Governors held a Special Board meeting at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, February 18, 2026 at Western Nebraska Community College, Coral E. Richards Boardroom, 1601 East 27th Street, in the City of Scottsbluff, in the County of Scotts Bluff, in the State of Nebraska, as per the publicized notice in the Star-Herald Saturday, February 14, 2026.

A current agenda was available in the Board Secretary's office on the Scottsbluff Campus at the time of the publicized notice.

AREA BOARD

Linda A. Guzman-Gonzales	Present
Joshua R. Hanson.....	Present
Mark A Kaufman	Present
Allan D. Kreman	Present
Starr Lehl, Vice Chair.....	Present
Lori J. Liggett.....	Absent
Coral E. Richards.....	Present
R. J. Savely, Jr.	Absent
Marjorie A. Schmidt.....	Present
John P. Stinner, Chair.....	Present (via Zoom)

Mr. Savely notified the Board secretary he was unable to attend the meeting due to personal business commitments. Ms. Liggett notified the Board secretary she was unable to attend the meeting due to personal health appointments.

QUORUM

Vice Chair Lehl declared a quorum was present for the transaction of business.

Approval of Agenda

Vice Chair Lehl entertained a motion for approval of the Special meeting agenda.

Mr. Kaufman MOVED to approve the Special meeting agenda. SECONDED by Ms. Guzman-Gonzales. The vote was, Yes: Guzman-Gonzales, Hanson, Kaufman, Kreman, Richards, Schmidt, Stinner, Lehl. No: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Liggett, Savely. Motion carried.

Community Comments

Pursuant to Board Policy BP-106 (Board Meetings); community members who wish to make a comment will be limited to a five-minute presentation.

Board Chairperson Comments

Copy of Nebraska Open Meetings Act Available on the table at the back of the room.

The Board reserves the right to enter into closed session if deemed necessary for any item on the agenda per §84-1410 of the Nebraska Revised Statutes.

Statement of Purpose

Vice Chair Lehl stated that the purpose of this special meeting is for a hearing regarding proposed closure of the WNCC Collision Repair program and Reduction in Force.

Appointment of Hearing Officer for Reduction in Force Hearing

Vice Chair Lehl entertained a motion to appoint attorney Mr. Kyle Long as the hearing officer for the Board's Special meeting hearing.

Mr. Kaufman MOVED to approve the appointment of Mr. Kyle Long as the hearing officer for the Board's Special meeting hearing. SECONDED by Ms. Schmidt. The vote was, Yes: Hanson, Kaufman, Kreman, Richards, Schmidt, Stinner, Guzman-Gonzales, Lehl. No: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Liggett, Savely. Motion carried.

Hearing Regarding Reduction in Force

Mr. Long stated that this is an informal due process hearing, open to the public. It is not a public hearing, and no public forum will be conducted as part of these proceedings. Mr. Long further explained that he has no role in the Board's ultimate determination; his responsibility is to conduct the hearing and assist the Board throughout the process.

Mr. Long explained that the evidence in this matter will consist of witness testimony, documents, and other materials admitted as exhibits. The parties may also stipulate certain facts, meaning those facts are formally agreed upon and require no additional proof. Counsel for each party will determine what evidence to present and which witnesses to call.

The administration has recommended that the Board implement a reduction in force due to the closure of the Collision Repair program and eliminate Mr. Corey Batt's contract as part of that action. The statutory authority governing a reduction in force is set forth in Nebraska Revised Statutes §§ 85-1531, 85-1528, and 85-1532, contracts of teaching staff and nurses employed by the community college require the approval of a majority of the Board members. Each contract is deemed renewed and remains in effect unless, at least sixty days before the end of the contract period, a majority of the Board votes to amend or terminate the contract for just cause.

As part of the reduction in force under §85-1531, the Board must be presented with competent evidence demonstrating that a change in circumstances has occurred necessitating the reduction. Any such change in circumstances must be specifically related to the teacher or teachers subject to the reduction. Based on the evidence presented at the hearing required by §85-1528, the Board must also make specific findings that no other staff vacancies exist for which the affected employee is qualified by endorsement or professional training.

Presentation of Program Data and Necessity for Reduction in Force

Opening statements were presented by Attorney Jerry Ostdiek and faculty member Corey Batt.

Attorney Ostdiek called President Dart as a witness. President Dart testified that when he assumed office in 2023, the Board of Governors directed him to implement several initiatives, including the College's strategic plan. One component of the plan required a comprehensive review of all academic programs offered by the College.

Presentation of Program Data and Necessity for Reduction in Force (cont.)

During the first review cycle for the 2024–2025 academic year, institutional data was collected and evaluated for each program. No programs were recommended for closure at that time. Instead, five programs identified through the evaluation process were scheduled for follow-up meetings to discuss strategies to improve performance and support long-term viability. The Collision Repair program was among those identified.

President Dart explained that the Collision Repair program serves both post–high school students and dual-credit high school students. The program currently employs one full-time faculty member and utilizes adjunct faculty periodically as needed.

Follow-up meetings with the identified programs were held in February 2025. The meeting regarding the Collision Repair program included President Dart, then–Executive Vice President Grant Wilson, then–Dean Charlie Gregory, and faculty member Corey Batt. Participants were provided with program review data in advance and discussed potential strategies to improve the program's performance and sustainability.

President Dart testified that the program evaluation process continued for the 2025–2026 academic year. The review process begins each November and uses consistent indicators to evaluate program performance, including both quantitative enrollment data and additional measures outlined in the College's two-part program review process.

The College's strategic plan includes an objective focused on both the creation of new programs and the sustainability of existing programs. To support this objective, the College implemented a formal two-part evaluation process used at the presidential level to assess program performance and determine whether programs may be appropriate for closure in accordance with Board policies, including reduction-in-force procedures.

Part One of the evaluation process reviews five quantitative indicators:

- Three-year average headcount of declared majors
- Three-year average student full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment
- Three-year average number of program awards granted
- Three-year average student FTE relative to instructional staffing levels
- Three-year average course FTE capacity within the program

Programs ranking in the bottom five in at least three of these five indicators are identified for further review.

President Dart referenced Exhibit 2, which contained data compiled by the College's Institutional Effectiveness Department for the 2025–2026 review cycle. The exhibit also identified programs placed on watch status during the 2024–2025 cycle and indicated whether those programs were workforce-oriented.

According to Exhibit 2, the Collision Repair program ranked lowest in the three-year average headcount of declared majors, averaging 2.42 declared majors per instructional FTE. By comparison, the next lowest-ranked program averaged 5.12 students per instructional FTE. President Dart testified that these figures demonstrate very low enrollment in the program, including participation from both post–high school and dual-credit students.

Presentation of Program Data and Necessity for Reduction in Force (cont.)

Attorney Ostdiek referenced the 2024–2025 program review results. President Dart testified that the data indicated the Collision Repair program was underperforming and that program reviews dating back to 2003 consistently show a history of low enrollment.

Based on the factors outlined in Board policies and procedures, President Dart testified that he recommended closure of the Collision Repair program. He stated that, in his opinion, closure is appropriate based on the available data.

President Dart further testified that elimination of the program would result in a reduction in force and, accordingly, he recommended termination of Corey Batt's faculty contract due to the elimination of the program and the resulting lack of need for the position.

Mr. Ostdiek asked whether there were any positions at WNCC for which Mr. Batt is certified and endorsed that are currently held by probationary faculty members. President Dart stated that there are none. He further testified that if a reduction in force occurs, Mr. Batt would have rehire priority under state law and Board policy. At this time, however, there are no instructional openings for which Mr. Batt is qualified or into which he could transfer.

President Dart clarified that the recommendation was not related to Mr. Batt's job performance but was based solely on the operational needs of the College following elimination of the program.

Opportunity for Faculty Member to Present Evidence

The hearing was opened for examination and cross-examination by faculty member Mr. Corey Batt.

Mr. Batt requested clarification regarding the February 2025 meeting referenced by President Dart, specifically asking whether the conversation included any action to assist with increasing enrollment in the Collision Repair program. President Dart responded that discussions with faculty focused on identifying factors that may be contributing to low enrollment and considering potential future trends. However, he noted that specific actions to increase enrollment were not part of that conversation.

Mr. Batt then inquired how faculty members from the other programs under review had been able to increase their enrollment numbers. President Dart responded that each program is unique and follows a different path toward growth. For example, the Early Childhood Education program, which was also identified for review, began offering additional hybrid courses. The instructor also organized conferences on campus and increased outreach efforts to surrounding communities. President Dart further explained that the Medical Lab Technologist program has worked with hospitals to encourage them to refer potential students who may then enroll in the program. In addition, the Health Information Technology program has begun offering a certificate in medical coding. President Dart reiterated that each program approaches enrollment growth differently based on the nature of the program and industry partnerships.

Mr. Batt continued by explaining that the Collision Repair program is often grouped with automotive repair programs, which can create confusion for prospective students. When students hear the term "automotive," whether referring to auto body or collision repair, they often assume the programs are the same and simply involve working on cars. Mr. Batt referenced a study conducted by TechForce, an automotive industry organization dedicated to supporting technicians in their careers. The study found that approximately 35,000 collision repair technicians were needed nationwide, while only about 4,500 students graduate from collision repair programs each year. He noted that many young people are not aware that collision repair is a viable career path.

Opportunity for Faculty Member to Present Evidence (cont.)

Mr. Batt addressed common misconceptions regarding wages in the industry. He explained that wage data reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics often appears lower than actual industry earnings because it does not fully account for how most collision repair technicians are compensated. Technicians are typically paid under a flat-rate system rather than receiving traditional hourly wages. According to the College's data, the average annual wage for a collision repair technician is listed as \$58,053. However, this figure does not reflect the impact of technician efficiency under the flat-rate system. For example, if a technician completes a job billed at ten hours in only eight hours, the technician is still compensated for the full ten hours, potentially resulting in significantly higher earnings.

Mr. Batt identified obstacles that he believes have affected the success of the Collision Repair program, including class enrollment caps, limited marketing efforts, and administrative turnover. In addition, changes within the automotive industry have further hindered the program's success. With newer vehicle body designs, damaged parts are more frequently replaced rather than repaired.

Several individuals representing area collision repair businesses also spoke during the hearing, emphasizing the continued need for trained collision repair technicians within the industry. Some business owners—who themselves graduated from the WNCC Collision Repair program—spoke highly of Mr. Batt, describing him as an excellent instructor and mentor during their time as students.

In an effort to address low enrollment and allow time to implement potential solutions, Mr. Batt and these individuals requested that the Collision Repair program remain in operation for at least two additional years.

Executive Session

Deliberation by the Board Regarding Closure of the WNCC Collision Repair Program and Reduction in Force Regarding the Faculty Member

Ms. Schmidt stated that pursuant to Section 84-1410 of the Reissue of the Revised Statutes known as the Nebraska Public Meetings Law that the Board hold a closed session with Kyle Long, Hearing Officer, and Susan Verbeck, Board Secretary, for the purpose of Board deliberations regarding closure of the WNCC Collision Repair Program and Reduction in Force regarding the faculty member.

Ms. Schmidt further moved that this meeting be closed to the public as it is clearly necessary for the protection of the public interest and to prevent needless injury to the reputation of an individual(s).

Mr. Hanson SECONDED the motion. The vote was, Yes: Kaufman, Kreman, Richards, Schmidt, Guzman-Gonzales, Hanson, Stinner, Lehl. No: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Liggett, Savely. None. Motion carried.

Vice Chair Lehl stated the reason for the Executive Session was for deliberation by the Board regarding closure of the WNCC Collision Repair program and Reduction in Force regarding the faculty member. The Board of Governors and those so named in the motion adjourned to an Executive Session at 3:07 p.m.

The Executive Session closed at 3:34 p.m.

Open Meeting

Vice Chair Lehl declared the open meeting in session at 3:37 p.m.

Recommendations/Action by the Board Regarding Closure of the WNCC Collision Repair Program and Reduction in Force Regarding the Faculty Member

Vice Chair Lehl entertained a motion regarding recommendations/action by the Board regarding closure of the WNCC Collision Repair program and Reduction in Force regarding the faculty member.

Mr. Kaufman MOVED that the Board approve the administration's recommendation to close WNCC's Collision Repair program, resulting in a reduction in force, and to accept the Findings of Fact document presented by legal counsel. Mr. Hanson SECONDED the motion. The vote was, Yes: Kreman, Richards, Schmidt, Guzman-Gonzales, Hanson, Kaufman, Stinner, Lehl. No: None. Abstain: None. Absent: Liggett, Savely. None. Motion carried.

Next Regular Meeting: Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 1:00 p.m., Coral E. Richards Boardroom, Western Nebraska Community College, Scottsbluff Campus, 1601 East 27th Street, Scottsbluff, Nebraska.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 3:45 p.m.

Starr Lehl, Vice Chair

Susan L. Verbeck, Secretary