

**Rock Valley College Board of Trustees
Illinois Community College District No. 511
3301 Mulford Road, Rockford, IL, 61114
Educational Resource Center, Performing Arts Room, Room 0214
Regular Meeting
January 27, 2026, 5:15 p.m.**

MINUTES

Call to Order

The Regular meeting of the Board of Trustees of Community College District No. 511, Winnebago, Boone, DeKalb, McHenry, Ogle, and Stephenson Counties, Illinois convened in the Performing Arts Room (PAR), Room 0214, in the Educational Resource Center (ERC) on the main campus on Tuesday, January 27, 2026. Board Chair Paul Gorski called the meeting to order at 5:16 p.m.

Roll Call

Mr. Paul Gorski
Ms. Kristen Simpson
Ms. Gloria Cardenas Cudia

Mr. Robert (Bob) Trojan
Mr. John Nelson 5:25 p.m.
Ms. Crystal Soltow 5:24 p.m.
Mr. Isiah Blake

The following trustee was absent at roll call: Dr. Jenna Goldsmith

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Trustee Trojan, to have Trustee Bob Trojan serve as secretary pro tempore. A vote was not taken.

Board Chair Gorski named Trustee Bob Trojan as secretary pro tempore.

Also in Attendance: Dr. Howard Spearman, President; Dr. Amanda Smith, Vice President of Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer; Heather Snider, Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Communications; Dr. Terrica Huntley, Vice President of Human Resources; Dr. Hansen Stewart, Vice President of Career Technical Education and Workforce Development; Mr. Rick Jenks, Vice President of Operations; Dr. Keith Barnes, Vice President of Cultural Excellence; Ms. Ann Kerwitz, Assistant to the President; Ms. Carly Huotari, Assistant to the President; Ms. Tracy Luethje, Executive Assistant to the Chief Operations Officer; Attorney Matthew Gardner, Robbins Schwartz.

Board Member Attendance by Means Other Than Physical Presence

There were no Board Members attending by any other means.

Communications and Petitions (Public Comment)

There were no petitions or public comments.

Board Chair Gorski received documents from the City of Rockford Public Works Department, and asked Dr. Spearman to forward these documents to appropriate staff.

Recognition of Visitors

Dr. Howard Spearman announced that the visitors will be introduced during general presentations.

General Presentations

1. **Review of Remodel Design Options for Classroom Building II (CLII) - Mr. Rick Jenks, Vice President of Operations; Bailey Edward Architects**
 - Ms. Ellen Olson, vice president of finance, explained how the College could pay for the additional cost based on what the Board decides for the CLII project. The College has working cash bond capacity for \$7.9 million. There is also a possibility for a fund transfer from Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) to Fund 03 of an additional \$1 million. The original \$18 million that was deposited into the Illinois Capital Development Board (CDB) account has earned over \$1 million in interest. Trustee Trojan asked if this project could be financed without bonds, and VP Ellen Olson said that it could not.
 - Ms. Ellen Bailey Dixon and Mr. Damon Dickson presented on behalf of Bailey Edward Architects. After meeting with the different departments at Rock Valley College (RVC), Bailey Edward Architects designed options around what each department requested. A large part of the budget is needed to improve the existing building. Additional dollars will be used to implement departmental requests into CLII. The presentation included the different options available, with a side-by-side comparison of Options Four and Five.
 - President Spearman stated that Option One would focus on renovating and modernizing CLII, without adding anything to programming or expanding credit classes, which is why Option Four and Five are being considered.
 - Discussion ensued. Trustee Cudia stated that we have waited many years to make a decision about CLII, and that construction costs will continue to increase. Trustee Trojan is interested in how the CLII remodel will affect enrollment numbers for the arts, and if collaboration with a four-year institution is possible. Trustee Simpson asked about additional staffing needs, and Dr. Smith, vice president of academic affairs, responded that Cabinet is currently discussing this. Board Chair Gorski confirmed with Bailey Edward Architects that these options do not include costs for Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment (FFE).
2. **State of the College - Ms. Heather Snider, Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Communications**
 - Trustees received the State of the College Report on January 12, 2026, and were able to submit questions to Cabinet, which Vice President Snider will answer tonight along with Vice President Ellen Olson, vice president of finance.
 - Vice President Snider talked about how Artificial Intelligence (AI) could impact jobs trends, and motivate industry partners to desire new hires to have baseline AI skills. RVC is building those competencies into its courses. Trustee Trojan requested a report in June 2026 from Mr. Peter Held, dean of workforce development, about AI updates in the community. Enrollment Trends and Return on Investment (ROI) will be presented at the Regular Board meeting on February 24, 2026. Trust and leadership were two of the items RVC is trying to improve as a result of the Culture Survey. This will be done by implementing listening circles, making changes to the Cabinet page on the RVC intranet, and analyzing

the 2025 culture survey to form additional action steps. When analyzing staff and faculty equity gaps, the Hispanic population is underrepresented. Ms. Snider reiterated that RVC does not hire based on ethnicity, race, or gender.

- Vice President Olson stated that the non-credit, net revenue operates at a loss because overhead costs are included in net revenue. Trustee Trojan would like to know what protocols other community colleges have in place when it comes to this issue. Board Chair Gorski asked for the Cabinet to report back on this in June or July of 2026. If RVC had a possible drop-off in revenues by 10% or more, the College would be able to function because RVC maintains the net position ratio of 35%-50%, which functions as a cushion. Eventually, compensation and benefits would take the biggest hit.
3. **10-Year Financial Forecast** - Ms. Ellen Olson, Vice President of Finance
- The Board requested a Financial Forecast Report that included five years prior and five years into the future. The Finance Department analyzes ten years at a time so that infrastructure can be put into place that will affect the future. The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool will help the College track all students, whether they are earning credit for a degree or workforce training. Trustee Trojan confirmed that this report is conservative but sound. Vice President Ellen Olson stated that a budget impasse or Equalized Assessed Value (EAV) decrease would affect this 10-year forecast.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve the minutes of the December 2, 2025, Committee of the Whole meeting and the December 16, 2025, Regular Board of Trustees meeting. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Adjourn to Closed Session

At 6:24 p.m., Trustee Gorski made a motion, seconded by Trustee Nelson, to adjourn to closed session to discuss: 1) The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees, specific individuals who serve as independent contractors in a park, recreational, or educational setting per Section 2 (c) (1); and/or 2) Litigation has been filed, is pending, or probable per Section 2 (c) (11); and/or 3) Discussion of minutes of meetings lawfully closed, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes per Section 2 (c) (21), all in accordance with the Illinois Open Meetings Act. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Reconvene Open Session

At 6:48 p.m., a motion was made by Trustee Nelson, seconded by Trustee Cudia, to adjourn the closed session and return to open session. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote. No action was taken as a result of the closed session.

Action Items

1. **BR8340 - Claims Sheet (Check Register – December 2025)**

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the claims sheet from the Ellucian check register for the period of December 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. The total is \$5,448,469.99.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve BR8340. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

2a. BR8341-A - Purchase Report A – FY2026 Amendments

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the item marked with an asterisk on Purchase Report A – FY2026 Amendments.

A motion was made by Trustee Trojan, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8341-A. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

2b. BR8341-B - Purchase Report B – FY2026 Purchases

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the items marked with an asterisk on Purchase Report B – FY2026 Purchases.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8341-B. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

3. BR8342 - Fiscal Year 2025 Audit, Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees accepts the Fiscal Year 2025 Financial Audit prepared by the independent auditing firm of Sikich, LLP.

A motion was made by Trustee Trojan, seconded by Trustee Nelson, to approve Board Report 8342. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

4. BR8343 - Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Project Requests

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the use of Fund 03 Capital funds for the above-described projects.

A motion was made by Trustee Trojan, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8343. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a majority roll call vote. Board Chair Gorski, Trustees Simpson, Cudia, Trojan, Soltow, and Student Trustee Blake (advisory) voted yes. Trustee Nelson voted no.

5. BR8344 - Fiscal Year Fund Transfer Request

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the College administration to allocate \$15,000,000 from Operating Funds for the above strategic initiatives.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8344. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

6. BR8345 - Revised Academic Calendar for 2026-2027

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves this revision to the 2026-2027 Academic Calendar.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8345. Discussion ensued. Dr. Amanda Smith, vice president of academic affairs, verified that the calendar is correct. She highlighted that 2026 Commencement will be held on Friday, May 15th, and 2027 Commencement will be held on Friday, May 14th. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

7. BR8346 - 2027-2028 Academic Calendar

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the 2027-2028 Academic Calendar.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8346. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

8. BR8347 - Community and Continuing Education Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hononegah High School District #207

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the Community and Continuing Education Memorandum of Understanding between Rock Valley College and Hononegah Community High School District #207, beginning January 1, 2026, and ending December 31, 2026.

A motion was made by Trustee Nelson, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8347. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

9. BR8348 - Rock Valley College Foundation Funding Increase Request

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the request to increase annual funding to the RVC Foundation by an additional \$100,000. This addition brings the new total annual funding to \$250,000, thus providing a portion of the operational needs of the Rock Valley College Foundation.

A motion was made by Trustee Trojan, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8348. Discussion ensued. Trustee Trojan asked if Dr. Spearman could consider finding donors to raise money for Classroom Building II (CLII). The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

10. BR8349 - Lobbying Service Agreement

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the Lobbying Services Agreement with LITE Strategies, LLC from February 1, 2026 through December 31, 2026.

A motion was made by Trustee Nelson, seconded by Trustee Soltow, to approve Board Report 8349. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

11. BR8350 - Closed Session Minutes through December 16, 2025

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the following:

1. That the minutes of the closed session meetings of May 13, 2025 through December 16, 2025 shall be approved.
2. That the need for confidentiality still exists for the closed meeting minutes for the period of May 13, 2025 through December 16, 2025.
3. That the verbatim recordings shall be maintained pursuant to an existing litigation hold on College records.
4. That minutes identified in this document shall continue to be confidential until further action of the Board of Trustees.
5. That the Board's legal counsel shall, after consulting with the Board's chair, have the ability to review any closed session meeting minutes that the Board previously approved to remain confidential, to respond to any Freedom of Information Act request, litigation discovery requests, or as otherwise required by court order, and to produce any said closed session meeting minutes or parts thereof where the need for confidentiality no longer exists.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Trustee Nelson, to approve Board Report 8350. There was no discussion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

12. BR8351 - Capital Development Board Project 810-080-017, Remodel of Classroom Building II (CLII), Selection of Remodel Design Option and Securing Bonds

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees 1) Choose Remodel Design Option _____, in the amount of \$ _____, which brings the estimated total capital cost to \$ _____, and 2) authorizes the College's Treasurer to secure bonds to fund the increased amount of RVC's estimated cost.

A motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8351. Following discussion, a friendly amendment was added to the motion to approve Remodel Design Option Four, with the approximate value of \$9.1 million for Classroom Building II (CLII). Trustee Cudia agreed to the friendly amendment. The motion, including the friendly amendment, was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

13. BR8352 - Approve Resolution of Intent to Reimburse Certain Capital Expenditures, including Classroom Building II (CLII) Project Expenditures, with the Proceeds of a Debt Obligation

The Board Report reads in part: It is recommended that the Board of Trustees approves the resolution to permit reimbursement for a portion of the additional capital expenditures associated with the altering, remodeling, and equipping of Classroom Building II, not to exceed \$8,000,000.

A motion was made by Trustee Nelson, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to approve Board Report 8352. The resolution reads: Resolution expressing official intent regarding certain capital expenditures to be reimbursed from proceeds of an obligation to be issued by Community College District No. 511, Counties of Winnebago, Ogle, Boone, Stephenson, DeKalb and McHenry and State of Illinois.

Discussion ensued. Vice President Olson explained how BR8352 allows the College to reimburse itself for the money that will need to be put into the CDB trust account based on the debt obligation that will be incurred in the future. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Other Business

1. **New Business**

- Board Chair Gorski mentioned that the Board Retreat agenda for January 31, 2026, will include a vote for expenses in relation to the Downtown Project.

2. **Unfinished Business**

- President Dr. Howard Spearman stated that the administration will share the State of the College campus-wide. On February 25, 2026, RVC will hold a Town Hall meeting to get campus feedback.
- Mr. Rick Jenks, vice president of operations, shared a Capital Projects Update, which detailed the proposed delays on certain projects in order to focus on the Downtown West campus project. Ms. Janet Taylor, executive director of plant operations and maintenance (POM), will become the project manager for the downtown campus. Dr. Spearman, Vice President Olson, and Vice President Jenks have decided that there is a need to hire a full-time construction manager to assist with other campus projects.

Updates/Reports

1. **President Update**

Dr. Spearman updated trustees on various topics:

- He welcomed new faculty members at an orientation in January, as well as engaged with various faculty at Faculty Development Day (FDD).
- Dr. Spearman also highlighted some community events he attended during the Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend: the Alpha Phi Alpha Inc. Breakfast; an event at Rockford University where several high school students engaged in an oratorical contest regarding civil rights; the Rockford Ministers Fellowship service where the RVC Foundation was presented with a check earmarked for scholarships; and the Rockford Ministers Fellowship community event, where community youth were highlighted.

2. **Leadership Update**

- Dr. Keith Barnes announced that for the National Day of Racial Healing on January 21, the Cultural Excellence and Belonging staff hosted a human library event, as well as Mr. Eldridge “Skip” Gilbert, to talk about Martin Luther King’s speech, “The Three Evils of Society.” RVC will host the annual Ebony Breakfast on February 6 to kick off Black History Month.
- Vice President Heather Snider reported on behalf of Dr. Patrick Peyer, vice president of student affairs. The topics included Welcome Week activities, Student Government Training, and the announcement of Subway no longer being a food vendor in the Stenstrom Student Center.

- Dr. Terrica Huntley, vice president of human resources, talked about the Statement of Economic Interest form that is required by the Illinois Governmental Ethics Act. The President, Cabinet, elected officials, and supervisors are required to fill out this form. Forms will be sent on February 1, 2026, and people can begin filling them out on March 1, 2026. The completed forms are due by May 1, 2026. Dr. Huntley also acknowledged the passing of two community leaders: Mr. Scott Christiansen, former Winnebago County Board Chair, and Rev. George Scott, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) president and RVC Alumnus.
 - Vice President Heather Snider gave the enrollment update. Spring enrollment is about flat compared to last year, 9% ahead of budget, and 4% ahead of the stretch goal. When Summer II, Fall, Winterim, and Spring are combined, the FY26 year-to-date enrollment is 3% ahead of last year, 8% ahead of budget, and 3% ahead of the stretch goal. Vice President Snider also announced that in response to Illinois House Bill 1312, RVC posted Administrative Procedure 1.10.070- Employee Guidance for Official Inquiries Concerning Authorities and Immigration- on the College website. Finally, VP Snider recognized Sharla Parsons for completing the Winter collection for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) more than three weeks early.
 - Dr. Hansen Stewart, vice president of career and technical education and workforce development, announced that two employees from Rock Valley College are being recognized as finalists for national awards by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). Ms. Brittany Freiberg, chief development officer, is a finalist for the Rising Star Award, and President Dr. Howard Spearman is a finalist for Outstanding CEO of the Year.
 - Mr. Rick Jenks, vice president of operations, highlighted that the Rock Valley College Starlight Theatre secured eight out of the 20 spots in the 2025 Broadway World Chicago Awards. Nominations and winners are determined entirely through public online voting.
 - Dr. Amanda Smith announced three events that focused on professional development, including the Virtual Adjunct Faculty Orientation, New Faculty Orientation, and Winter Faculty Development Day.
3. **Illinois Community College Trustee Association (ICCTA) Report-** Trustee Nelson reported that he will be part of a Zoom meeting to prepare for his attendance at the ACCT Legislative Summit in Washington, D.C., being held from February 8-11, 2026.
 4. **Student Trustee Report-** Student Trustee Isiah Blake prepared comments citing concerns about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and our duty as an educational organization to respond.
 5. **Trustee Comments**
 - Trustee Bob Trojan talked about his recent tour of the Rockford Public School (RPS) #205 Quad, formerly known as the RVC Stenstrom Center for Career Education.

- Trustee Gloria Cudia addressed some concerns brought forward by Trustee Isiah Blake in his student trustee report.
 - Board Chair Gorski and Trustee John Nelson reflected on the passing of former Winnebago County Board Chairman, Scott Christiansen.
6. **RVC Foundation Liaison Report-** Trustee Bob Trojan announced that the RVC Foundation released their Impact Report to trustees via email.
 7. **Personnel Report (BR8353)-** Information only- The Personnel Report was accepted as presented with no questions.
 8. **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report-** The FOIA Report was accepted as presented with no questions.

Next Meeting

The next Board of Trustees Retreat will be held on January 31, 2026, at 8:00 a.m. The meeting will be held in the Woodward Technology Center (WTC), Room 1308, located on the main campus.

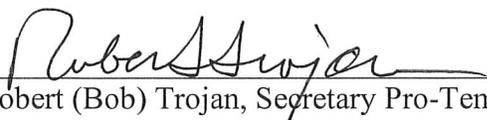
The next Committee of the Whole meeting will be held on February 10, 2026, at 5:15 p.m. The meeting will be held in the Performing Arts Room (PAR), Room 0214, located in the Educational Resource Center (ERC) on the main campus.

The next Regular Board of Trustees meeting will be held on February 24, 2026, 5:15 p.m. The meeting will be held in the Performing Arts Room (PAR), Room 0214, located in the Educational Resource Center (ERC) on the main campus.

Adjournment

At 8:10 p.m., a motion was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Student Trustee Blake, to adjourn the Regular meeting. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote.

Submitted by Carly A. Huotari


Robert (Bob) Trojan, Secretary Pro-Tempore


Paul Gorski, Board Chair