

**Illinois Community College District #511  
Rock Valley College  
3301 North Mulford Road  
Rockford, IL 61114**

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES SPECIAL MEETING – RETREAT  
Saturday, January 31, 2026, 8:00 a.m.  
Woodward Technology Center Room 1308**

**MINUTES**

**Call to Order**

The Special meeting of the Board of Trustees of Community College District No. 511, Winnebago, Boone, DeKalb, McHenry, Ogle, and Stephenson Counties, Illinois, convened in Room 1308 in the Woodward Technology Center (WTC) on the main campus on Saturday, January 31, 2026. Board Chair Paul Gorski called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m.

**Roll Call**

The following trustees were present at roll call:

Mr. Paul Gorski	Mr. Robert (Bob) Trojan
Ms. Kristen Simpson	Ms. Gloria Cardenas Cudia
Dr. Jenna Goldsmith	

The following trustees were absent at roll call: Ms. Crystal Soltow, Student Trustee Isiah Blake. Mr. John Nelson arrived at 8:25 p.m.

Also in attendance: Dr. Howard Spearman, President; Mr. Rick Jenks, Vice President of Operations; Dr. Amanda Smith, Vice President of Academic Affairs/Chief Academic Officer; Dr. Terrica Huntley, Vice President of Human Resources; Ms. Ellen Olson, Vice President of Finance/Chief Financial Officer; Ms. Heather Snider, Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Communications; Dr. Hansen Stewart, Vice President of Career and Technical Education and Workforce Development; Dr. Patrick Peyer, Vice President of Student Affairs; Dr. Keith Barnes, Vice President of Cultural Excellence; Ms. Ann Kerwitz, Assistant to the President, Ms. Carly Huotari, Assistant to the President; Attorney Matthew Gardner, Robbins Schwartz; Mr. Jim Reed, Executive Director of Illinois Community College Trustees Association.

**Communications and Petitions (Public Comment)**

No communications or petitions were presented.

**Recognition of Visitors**

Board Chair Gorski welcomed Mr. Jim Reed, executive director of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA).

## Discussion

### **1. Team-building Exercise #1**

One half of those in attendance shared interesting facts about themselves.

At 8:25 a.m. Trustee John Nelson arrived.

### **2. Strategic Plan Update**

Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Communications Heather Snider presented the Strategic Plan Update, explaining that Dr. Julie Kunselman of Studer Education, co-presenter, was unable to attend the meeting. Ms. Snider reviewed the strategic planning process and defined the four pillars (Access, Education, Training, Culture), noting that Dr. Janet Pilcher and Dr. Julie Kunselman of Studer Education helped administrators to define college-wide goals based on divisional goals, and to develop the scorecard to monitor progress. She also highlighted:

- The current 2022-2027 Strategic Plan will be “refreshed” and a draft presented to trustees by the end of the calendar year.
- Pillars will remain the same, but Mission, Vision, and Core Values will be reviewed, as recommended by the Higher Learning Commission.
- The Strategic Enrollment Management Plan and Academic Plan with focus on adult learners will be incorporated in the “refresh.”
- An Institutional Effectiveness Committee will be established, and the Cabinet and Leadership Development Institute (LDI) will continue to work with Studer Education.
- Institutional documents, forms and budget requests are aligned with the four pillars.
- Future presentations to the trustees will align the presented materials to the four pillars.
- Front-end execution and back-end support for Implementation, Communication, and Recognition and Community Leadership were reviewed.
- Next steps include scheduling a workforce collaborative event similar to the K-20 events co-sponsored by RVC and Studer Education. Focus will be on customized training and gathering feedback on future strategy before submitting a grant proposal.

Discussion ensued regarding partnerships with area K-12 schools, and how coaching and content discussions with Studer Education align with the Strategic Plan. Ms. Snider added that the College has grown tremendously under the Strategic Plan. She also announced that Vice President Snider, Vice President Dr. Hansen Stewart and Dr. Spearman have been invited to present at Studer Education’s national conference in June.

### **3. Enrollment: Getting Started Steps and SWOT Analysis**

Dr. Patrick Peyer, vice president of student affairs, presented a review of the student enrollment process and data available through the CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system used by the College. CRM data includes Request for Information (RFI), email engagements, applications, appointments, and enrollments.

Dr. Peyer also reviewed how the Getting Started process helps with Technology, Placement, and Registration and Payment, and provided data on Persistence by Race/Ethnicity.

Discussion ensued regarding academic advisors and how they function within the College, area K-12 schools, competition from other institutions, and K-12 and community partnerships.

Dr. Peyer then reviewed the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis as outlined in his presentation. In summary, future enrollment will likely be flat to modest growth (0%–+4%) over the next three to five years.

Following a brief break, the meeting continued.

#### **4. Bank and Investment Strategy Analysis**

Vice President Ellen Olson reviewed the College's banking and investment strategy, noting that the strategy prioritizes safety, liquidity, and yield, in that order, aligning with Illinois Statutes and best practices in public fund management. She added that the goal is to ensure that public funds are protected, accessible when needed, and earning reasonable returns to support the College's educational mission. Ms. Olson also reviewed the objectives, current financial overview, banking strategy, fixed income portfolio snapshot, and reporting and oversight. Her recommendations include: 1) Review the Investment Policy annually and ensure alignment with state laws; 2) Maintain banking RFP process every 3-5 years to ensure competitive service; 3) Continue and increase use of cash management technology; 4) Consider professional investment advisory services for portfolio management if assets exceed internal expertise.

During discussion, Ms. Olson confirmed that the College is restricted from investing in the stock market.

#### **5. Team-building Exercise #2**

Attendees who had not shared personal stories earlier in the meeting described interesting facts about themselves.

#### **6. Legislative Update**

Board Chair Gorski introduced Mr. Jim Reed, executive director of the Illinois Community College Trustees Association (ICCTA), who provided an update on federal legislative priorities of ACCT (Association of Community College Trustees) and AACC (American Association of Community Colleges), Illinois legislative issues, and ICCTA legislative priorities. ACCT and AACC legislative priorities include the following:

1. Appropriate necessary dollars for Pell Grants
2. End taxation of Pell Grants
3. Modify the American Opportunity Tax Credit
4. Strengthen under-resourced institutions
5. Ensure America's economic prosperity
6. Buoy rural community colleges
7. Strengthen the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
8. Bolster job training and career and technical education
9. Support adult basic education (ABE)
10. Fortify child care access means parents in schools (CCAMPIS)

ICCTA's legislative priorities include

1. Pursue community college workforce degrees through baccalaureate degree offerings.
2. Enhance student transfer and articulation policies between community colleges and four-year institutions. The Illinois Community College Council of Presidents (ICCCP) is working on common-course numbering for community colleges, but it's a major project to then align that with four-year schools.

3. Prepare Illinois' future workers to equip students with workforce skills needed in a rapidly changing economy.

Mr. Reed noted that the ACCT Leadership Congress will be held October 21-24, 2026, in Chicago, and plans are being made to showcase all of Illinois' community colleges.

Discussion ensued how community college baccalaureate degrees would help access and affordability for students, financial literacy offerings by educational and community institutions, and state investment in technical education, pathways, and emerging technology.

Mr. Reed reminded trustees of Lobby Day to be held May 6 in Springfield, as well as the ACCT Legislative Summit to be held in Washington, D.C., February 8-11, and provided tips for preparing for those meetings with legislators. The students' Lobby Day will be held in Springfield on April 16.

## **7. Key Takeaways**

RVC President Dr. Howard Spearman reviewed the key takeaways for the meeting.

1. Board requests and presentations will show alignment to the Strategic Plan.
2. Trustees may want to participate in the Studer Education national conference in June.
3. Administration will be changing the goals for the Strategic Plan Refresh.
4. The Strategic Enrollment Management plan will help determine how we meet our goals for the Strategic Plan Refresh and reach adult learners.
5. The CRM software will help improve the communication process with students.
6. We will establish an internship program that involves students in the community and on campus.
7. RVC is offering dual credit programs at RPS 205's The Quad located at RVC's former Stenstrom Center for Career Education.
8. Offering stackable credentials in healthcare and CTE will help students earn a degree.
9. The College will work with the Awaken Foundation to create an apprenticeship program in culinary arts to be held off-campus.
10. Lobby Day for students will be held in Springfield on April 16. Dr. Spearman will be attending the Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) state banquet that night.
11. Lobby Day for trustees will be held in Springfield, May 6. It's a great opportunity to meet legislators.

### **Adjourn to Closed Session**

A closed session was not held.

### **Action Item**

A motion was made by Trustee Simpson, seconded by Trustee Cudia, to approve Board Report #8354.

Attorney Matthew Gardner reminded trustees of the discussion held during the January 27, 2026 regular Board meeting and how the agreement with DKA architects for the Downtown West construction project was reached. He noted that the agreement does not include any other services and must be brought to the College. He recommended adding a friendly amendment to the motion to approve Board Report #8354 subject to a written amendment to the College's existing contract

with DKA, which shall be subject to the Board of Trustees attorney review. Trustees Simpson and Cudia agreed to the friendly amendment, and a vote was taken.

The motion including the friendly amendment was approved by majority roll call vote. Trustees Trojan, Simpson, Cudia, Goldsmith and Gorski voted yes. Trustee Nelson voted no.

**Next Meeting**

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

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

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Board, at 12:17 p.m., a motion to adjourn was made by Trustee Cudia, seconded by Trustee Simpson. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Submitted by Ann L. Kerwitz

  
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Dr. Jenna Goldsmith, Secretary

  
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Paul Gorski, Board Chair