

**Minutes of the
Gaston College
Board of Trustees Retreat and Called Board of Trustees Meeting
Gaston Country Club
February 6, 2026**

Members Present: Judge Jesse Caldwell, Chair
Mr. Bill Carstarphen
Mr. John Dancoff
Dr. Shawnya Gore, Secretary
Mr. Jonathan Fletcher
Mr. Steve Hall
Ms. Iris Hopper
Mr. Steve Huffstetler
Mr. David Lee
Ms. Janie Peak, Vice Chair
Ms. Julie Stroupe
Mr. Bannock Scott, SGA Representative

Dr. John Hauser, President

Members Absent: Mr. Alan Cloninger, Ms. Resa Hoyle, and Mr. Tom Keigher

Others Present: Mr. Todd Baney, Ms. Tonia Broome, Mr. Brett Buchanan, Ms. Jasmine Cox-Wade, Dr. Dewey Dellinger, Ms. Guyann Howe, Ms. Sarah Hutchins, Ms. Andrea Lovelace, Mr. Mack Millen, Mr. Stephen Sharp, Dr. Aaron Slutsky, and Mr. Mike Whiteman.

Chair Caldwell called the meeting to order at 8:50 a.m. A quorum was present for the Board of Trustees Retreat.

- **Invocation – Mr. Hall**

Welcome

Chair Caldwell welcomed everyone to the Retreat and thanked them for attending. He then asked Dr. Hauser for any updates he would like to share:

- According to Gaston College (GC) Policy 3-129 Political Activity, he is to notify the Board of Trustees of any employee running for public office. He shared that Mr. Mark Carver, History instructor for GC, is running for the NC House.
- At Dr. Hauser's request, Ms. Cox-Wade shared that on Monday, February 9, 2026, the Kimbrell Campus and the Duke Kimbrell Fiber Innovation Center would be hosting visitors from the National Science Foundation (NSF). NC Senator Brad Overcash will also be in attendance. The purpose of the meeting is to review the NSF Engine research consortium, including:
 - Activities at the Kimbrell Fiber Innovation Center

- Translational research outcomes over the past two years.
Visitors will also tour the Regenerative Medicine Engine in the Winston-Salem area.
North Carolina is currently the only state with two NSF-funded engines, which is a key reason for the visit. The meeting is expected to be brief but information-dense.
 - Following this meeting, Dr. Hauser will travel to Raleigh, accompanied by Jasmine Cox-Wade and Charles Heilig from Parkdale Mills, to present to Senator Brad Overcash and the Legislative Education Oversight Committee in support of the \$4 million recurring funds request for the NC Center for Applied Textile Technology at Gaston College.
 - After the Legislative presentation, on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, Dr. Hauser and Mr. Stephen Sharp will travel to Boston – Natick Soldier Center.
 - On Wednesday, February 11, Dr. Hauser will be attending a meeting and preparing for a presentation at the Natick Soldier Center on Thursday, February 12.
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I. **Board Survey and Self-Evaluation**

The Board reviewed the results of the annual Gaston College Board of Trustees Survey and Self-Evaluation, which were collected via SurveyMonkey. Survey scale rating categories included: Strongly Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, and Strongly Agree. Surveys were conducted anonymously to preserve integrity and encourage candid feedback. Fourteen out of fifteen Trustees participated in the survey.

Chair Caldwell presented the survey responses that received the highest scores, highlighting the following key areas:

- Reminders of Board members' ethical and legal responsibilities are clearly communicated at regular times, such as at the start of its meetings.
- Board Agendas and meeting materials are received in time for review and preparation.

Chair Caldwell shared that no items on the survey received a “Strongly Disagree” rating. Five categories that received lower ratings related primarily to roles and responsibilities, participation, and engagement. Overall scores improved compared to the previous year, which was also rated positively.

Discussion highlights regarding the survey were:

- The importance of direct communication rather than relying solely on anonymous survey feedback.
- Trustees are encouraged to raise concerns openly with leadership or administration.
- Trustees were encouraged to take responsibility for offering their skills and seeking opportunities to contribute.
- Stronger committee work has reduced redundancy at the full board meetings; however, Trustees were reminded they may attend and vote in any committee meeting.

II. **Gaston College Strategic Plan**

Ms. Broome presented:

- The college has transitioned from a 5–10-year strategic plan to a rolling three-year plan.
- The current plan (2023–2026) was approved in January 2024 and has been reviewed annually.

- Leadership emphasized that the three-year model is:
 - Data-driven
 - Actively reviewed and updated
 - Integrated across divisions
- The next strategic plan (2026–2029) is under development and was presented to the Board for initial review and feedback.
- Board members were encouraged to ask questions and provide input.

Strategic Priority #1: Enrollment Growth & Access

Key Goals

- Increase student applications by 2% annually
- Improve application-to-enrollment yield
- Increase unduplicated headcount and Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)
- Long-term targets:
 - ~20,000 unduplicated headcount
 - ~7,000 total FTE

Discussion Highlights

- Enrollment growth has exceeded original projections, with recent years showing 6–9% sustained growth, outperforming many peer institutions.
- Growth drivers identified:
 - Dual enrollment and Early College expansion
 - Workforce development and customized training
 - Strong marketing and brand recognition
 - Athletics and media exposure (including public radio outreach)
 - Industry partnerships and apprenticeship programs
- Board acknowledged that goals are aggressive but realistic, with targets adjusted annually based on actual performance.

FTE Breakdown Targets

- Curriculum FTE: ~5,700
- Workforce/Continuing Education FTE: ~1,000
- Basic Skills FTE: ~300

Facilities Impact

- Board raised concerns about space constraints if enrollment continues to grow.
- Leadership confirmed that facilities planning and capital investment are being aligned with enrollment projections.

Marketing & Outreach

- Goals include:
 - Increased media coverage
 - Expanded social media engagement
 - Higher website traffic

- Strong consensus that branding and visibility have materially supported enrollment growth.

Strategic Priority #2: Student Success & Completion

Performance Metrics

- For the first time, the college met or exceeded the statewide average across all performance measures.
- Improvements noted in:
 - Course completion
 - Retention
 - Graduation rates
 - Licensure pass rates

Retention & Completion Targets

- Course withdrawal rate: Maintain at ~10%
- Fall-to-spring retention: 75%
- Fall-to-fall retention: 56%
- First-year 12-credit completion: 61.5%
- Graduation rate: 66%

Student Engagement & Advising

- Use of targeted communication campaigns to guide students through enrollment and onboarding steps.
- Emphasis on structured academic plans developed with advisors.
- Recognition that some students leave programs early after gaining employable skills but before completing credentials.
- Use of stackable credentials (certificates, diplomas, degrees) highlighted as a strategy to improve completion.

Student Feedback

- Student satisfaction surveys and course evaluations are used extensively.
- Feedback is reviewed at institutional, program, and instructor levels.
- Data used to identify trends, highlight excellence, and address recurring issues.

Strategic Priority #3: Partnerships and Community Engagement

Workforce & Industry

- Expand customized training offerings to 600 courses by FY 2029.
- Increase apprenticeship participation to 200 students.
- Expand work-based learning opportunities.
- Industry engagement tied closely to economic conditions and workforce demand.

Scholarships:

- Goal to increase:
 - Total scholarship funds available
 - Number of scholarships awarded

- Number of students receiving awards
- Noted fluctuation due to completion of a large external grant.
- Foundation scholarships primarily serve as last-dollar aid.

Athletics & Community Engagement

- Athletics highlighted as a branding and engagement tool.
- Student-athletes involved in youth outreach and community service.
- Expanded student roles in athletic operations and event management.

High School & University Partnerships

- Expansion of College Now (dual enrollment) with a target of 4,000 students.
- Development of targeted recruitment strategies for Career and Technical Education (CTE) concentrators.
- Transfer guarantee agreements currently in place with 12 universities, serving 66 students.
- Discussion noted ongoing challenges securing partnerships with certain institutions.

Strategic Priority #4: Organizational Development

Employee Support

- Focus on:
 - Professional development
 - Onboarding
 - Work-life balance
 - Mental health and wellness
- Efforts underway to better track and benchmark professional development investment.

Onboarding & Culture

- New employees praised the onboarding process.
- Professional Development Day theme: Culture of Care and Communication.

Strategic Priority #5: Finance and Development

Financial Management

- Budgeting aligned with strategic priorities.
- Early budget planning emphasized.
- Continued compliance with audits and regulations.
- Expansion of proprietary revenue sources (bookstore, centers, grants).

Strategic Priority #6: Operational Infrastructure

Facilities & Capital Planning

- Development of a 5-year Facilities Master Plan.
- Focus areas:
 - Deferred maintenance
 - Space utilization
 - Safety and security upgrades
 - Cybersecurity enhancements
- Board discussion emphasized urgency around aging infrastructure and county capital funding support.

Strategic Priority #7: Emerging & Immersive Technologies

New Priority

- Recognized as critical enough to stand alone.
- Goals include:
 - Establishing organizational structure for immersive and simulation technologies
 - Creating dedicated simulation spaces
 - Integrating immersive learning into at least five programs
 - Partnering with employers to co-design simulations
 - Securing grant or corporate funding Status
- Initial employer commitments received.
- Planning ongoing regarding staffing, facilities, and funding models.

Board Comments & Closing Discussion

- Trustees emphasized the importance of:
 - County capital support
 - Advocacy with commissioners
 - Communicating the college's value to the community
- Overall consensus expressed strong support for the strategic direction and appreciation for the comprehensive planning effort.

III. Presentation on Proposed Manufacturing USA Institute & Federal Opportunity

(added Retreat agenda item)

Overview

- Dr. Hauser presented a major federal opportunity that has been confidentially under development through intensive collaboration over the past several weeks.

- Development involved multiple working groups meeting up to twice daily, with participation ranging from small teams to groups of up to 25 stakeholders.
- The resulting proposal consolidates extensive data, industry input, and institutional capabilities into a formal presentation.
- The federal agency (Department of War) is evaluating proposals based on three core pillars:
 1. Technology Transformation
 - Focus on advanced fibers and materials—not traditional textiles.
 - Applications include:
 - Protective equipment
 - Drones
 - Wearables
 - Advanced defense technologies
 - Emphasis on direct benefit to warfighters and national security.
 2. National Industry Integration
 - Establishment of nationwide manufacturing partnerships, not limited to North Carolina.
 - Objective to restore advanced manufacturing and fiber development within the United States.
 - Strong alignment with national supply chain resiliency goals.
 3. Education & Workforce Development
 - Gaston College is identified as a national leader in workforce training among peer institutions.
 - Over 2,000 individuals trained in textiles annually through on-campus and online delivery.
 - Workforce impact cited as a distinguishing strength of the proposal.
- The proposal targets a share of \$450 million in federal funding with three other entities competing for up to four institute awards. Initial internal evaluation against federal criteria identified a few areas of focus. The proposal now meets 5 out of 6 scoring criteria. The final 1-hour presentation is 59 slides.
- The proposed institute: FutureTEX would be structured as an independent nonprofit organization, which is required by federal guidelines. The organization would have a separate governing board, independent CEO, and staff.
- Gaston College would remain highly integrated, but the institute would operate independently. Funding would partially offset staffing and operational costs at the college.
- The Consortium includes:
 - Gaston College
 - NC State Textile Innovation Engine (NSF-funded)
 - Drexel University
 - Georgia Tech Manufacturing Institute
 - UMass
 - ISAIC (nonprofit training organization)

- The Consortium provides expertise in various key areas such as: curriculum development, research and prototyping, Technology standards, and Workforce education.
- There would be a major emphasis on rebranding American textiles as advanced, high-tech manufacturing.
- National outreach strategy to: Change public perception, recruit workforce and attract companies.
- Potential integration with public media outlets (e.g., podcast development).
- Workforce training to be delivered through: Online immersive technologies, hybrid and face-to-face instruction, National access (including military personnel).
- Multi-entry and multi-exit pathways established: certificates, associate degrees and advanced credentials. Stackable credentials already implemented with university partners.
- Target populations are: Current industry workers, Military personnel transitioning to civilian careers, K-12 students, and adult learners seeking reskilling.
- At least five academic programs identified for early integration.
- Federal partners have formally requested that Gaston College serve as the headquarters for the institute with the proposed location at the Kimbrell Campus.
- Implications:
 - Establishment of nonprofit entity hosted on campus
 - National conferences, summits, and industry visits (strong economic and reputational impact for the College and region).
 - Rental and indirect cost revenue streams for the college
- The Institute would:
 - Anchor advanced manufacturing in the U.S.
 - Reduce reliance on foreign production of critical equipment
 - Support domestic equipment manufacturing
- North Carolina positioned as a national hub.
- Gaston College uniquely suited due to:
 - Existing Fiber Innovation Center
 - Ability to rapidly prototype and scale production
 - Applied (not theoretical) manufacturing focus
- Manufacturing USA currently includes 18 federally funded institutes. Supported by Departments of Defense, Energy, and Commerce
- Prior Department of Defense textile institute failed due to lack of integrated partnerships.
- Nonprofit institute would generate revenue through: Office space leasing, Conferences and summits, and indirect cost recovery
- Significant industry traffic expected on campus.
- Activities would complement—not replace—college operations.
- Next Steps:
 1. Nonprofit structure details to be reviewed with legal and governance leadership.
 2. Board engagement required before nonprofit formation.

Ms. Sarah Hutchins, College Attorney, fielded questions on the formation of a nonprofit entity

- Dr. Hauser clarified that all discussions regarding nonprofit formation is contingent upon the award of the federal grant.
- The Board was informed that, following the retreat presentation, the meeting would transition into formal board business, including required procedural items and recorded motions.

Purpose and Authority for Nonprofit Formation

- Ms. Hutchins explained that North Carolina law encourages community colleges to establish nonprofit entities.
- Gaston College already operates a nonprofit foundation, and state statutes explicitly support community colleges engaging in nonprofit activity.
- The intent of such nonprofits includes:
 - Fundraising
 - Innovation
 - Economic development
 - Expanded partnerships beyond the limitations of a state agency
- The proposed nonprofit would enable the college to participate in a federally required governance structure for the institute.

Governance Structure & Oversight

- The proposed nonprofit would:
 - Have its own bylaws
 - Operate under an independent governing board
 - Employ its own leadership and staff
- While independent, the nonprofit would remain affiliated with Gaston College, similar to a subsidiary relationship.
- Gaston College would retain operational oversight responsibilities, as permitted by law, but day-to-day governance would be handled by the nonprofit's board.
- Consortium partners are expected to have representation on the nonprofit board, though final composition would be determined through its bylaws.

Relationship Between the College and the Nonprofit

- The relationship would be governed primarily through intercompany agreements, including:
 - Shared facilities
 - Shared personnel (if applicable)
 - Use of campus resources
- Additional agreements may allow third parties to use college facilities (e.g., conference space), potentially generating direct revenue for the college.
- These agreements would require Board approval to ensure:
 - Appropriate use of public resources
 - Fair compensation
 - Legal compliance

Risk, Liability, and Insurance Considerations

- Ms. Hutchins emphasized that new initiatives inherently carry risk.
- Risk mitigation strategies would include:
 - Insurance policies held by the nonprofit
 - Clear contractual boundaries between the college and the nonprofit
 - Independent legal representation for the nonprofit
- The nonprofit would be responsible for conducting its own risk assessments and compliance planning.
- Counsel expressed confidence that risks could be effectively managed and insulated from the college to the extent permitted by law.

Security & Federal Compliance

- Due to Department of Defense involvement, heightened requirements are anticipated for:
 - Information security
 - Data storage
 - Physical security
- The nonprofit would be responsible for meeting federal security requirements, potentially requiring:
 - Separate IT infrastructure
 - Restricted-access facilities
- A government contracting attorney with appropriate security clearance has been engaged to advise on compliance.

Timing & Cost of Nonprofit Formation

- The Board discussed whether to begin nonprofit formation before grant award.
- Ms. Hutchins advised:
 - Initial preparatory steps are low cost
 - Full formation would involve legal filings, IRS submissions, and governance documentation
- Estimated cost to establish the nonprofit (including legal work): up to \$25,000
- IRS approval for 501(c)(3) status could take 3–9 months.
- Recommendation:
 - Board authorization to proceed only upon grant award
 - Preparatory work may occur, but no significant expenditures would be incurred without confirmation of funding

Board Discussion & Clarifications

- Trustees raised questions regarding:
 - Ownership and responsibility of the nonprofit
 - Liability exposure
 - Board representation

- Shared staffing models
- Ms. Hutchins noted that shared staffing arrangements can be complex and should be approached cautiously.
- It was reiterated that:
 - The nonprofit would function as a separate legal entity
 - Gaston College would not directly manage daily operations
 - All agreements would return to the Board for approval

Anticipated Board Action

- Leadership indicated that a future motion would request Board approval to:
 - Authorize nonprofit formation contingent upon grant award
 - Permit immediate action following award notification to avoid delays
 - Award notification expected mid-March.
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At 12:43 p.m. Chair Caldwell Called the Board of Trustees Called Meeting to Order.

Trustees in attendance were: Judge Jesse Caldwell, Mr. John Dancoff, Dr. Shawnya Gore, Mr. Jonathan Fletcher, Mr. Steve Hall, Ms. Iris Hopper, Mr. Steve Huffstetler, Mr. David Lee, Ms. Janie Peak, Ms. Julie Stroupe, and Mr. Bannock Scott, SGA Representative. A quorum was present.

Ethics Awareness and Conflict of Interest Reminder

Chair Caldwell reminded Trustees of the ethics requirements of public servants and requested they identify any conflicts of interest or appearance of conflicts of interest present. No conflicts were identified.

Mr. Huffstetler made a motion to approve the proposed agenda, with an amendment to the previously scheduled Executive Session portion to add the Proposed Establishment of Non-Profit action item. The motion was seconded by Mr. Fletcher. The motion passed.

ACTION ITEM 1: Proposed Establishment of Non-Profit

Dr. Hauser shared with the Board of Trustees that in support of the possibility that the Department of War elects to go forward with the Consortium's proposal which was presented during the Retreat, he respectfully requested the Board of Trustees' approval to prepare for the formation of FutureTEX, a nonprofit organization to be anchored at the W. Duke Kimbrell Campus and the North Carolina Center for Applied Textile Technology, including the Kimbrell Fiber Innovation Center.

Mr. Huffstetler moved that the Board of Trustees authorize Gaston College to take all steps necessary toward the establishment of a new nonprofit organization to be anchored at the W. Duke Kimbrell Campus and the North Carolina Center for Applied Textile Technology, including the Kimbrell Fiber Innovation Center. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lee.

Questions and concerns were raised regarding how the operating agreement with the Consortium would function. Ms. Hutchins explained that the timeline would involve first establishing the nonprofit, after which the details would be worked through with the assistance of her office.

With no further discussion, **the motion passed.**

ACTION ITEM 2: Gaston College Strategic Plan

Chair Caldwell shared that the College began the process of developing the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan by reviewing and updating the existing 2023–2026 plan. In Fall 2025, the President’s Cabinet initiated a comprehensive review of the current strategic plan to extend it for an additional three years. Results and assessment data from the first two years of implementation were analyzed to inform edits, updates, and refinements. New initiatives aligned with institutional priorities were integrated into the revised plan. The College considered ongoing feedback gathered through student surveys, course evaluations, and unit plan results. This iterative review process was used to reaffirm and refine the College’s strategic priorities, goals, and expected outcomes for the Gaston College Strategic Plan (2026–2029). The original 2023-2026 Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Trustees on January 22, 2024.

IMPLICATION FOR BUDGET

Implementation of the College’s new strategic plan will take place at the individual unit level (academic affairs, student affairs, marketing, etc.). Current divisional/unit budgets will be used to implement action items for each area of the strategic plan. As a result of this implementation, there is an expected outcome of increased enrollment, persistence, and retention. Therefore, it is anticipated that there will be an impact of increased FTE generation over the life of the plan.

Based on this information and Ms. Broome’s presentation during the Retreat, Chair Caldwell entertained a motion that the Gaston College Board of Trustees approves the updated 2023-2026 Gaston College Strategic Plan, making it effective 2026 – 2029 as presented.

Ms. Peak moved that the Board of Trustees approves the updated 2023-2026 Gaston College Strategic Plan, making it effective 2026-2029 as presented. Mr. Hall seconded the motion.

With no further discussion, **the motion passed.**

ACTION ITEM 3: Board of Trustees Bylaws

- Ms. Hutchins presented a redline version of the bylaw updates intended to:
 - Align with North Carolina statutes
 - Clarify authority, conflict-of-interest provisions, and governance language
 - Reduce potential conflicts and ensure good-governance practices
- Key substantive areas highlighted:
 - Conflict-of-interest language clarified to reflect trustee obligations under state law.
 - County commissioner representation clarified/limited to align with statute and governance best practice.
 - Term limits proposed as a governance enhancement to support:
 - Leadership development
 - Succession planning
 - Fresh perspectives and broader representation
 - Reduced long-term governance risk

Trustees discussed:

- "Elected" vs. "appointed" wording in the bylaws; Ms. Hutchins noted language mirrors statutory phrasing.
- Whether the Board may limit the number of county commissioners serving as trustees; Ms. Hutchins confirmed the Board is limiting seats on the Board, consistent with statute.
- Term limits and how they would apply (prospective application; not resetting all members to "zero" immediately).
- Concerns about waiver language creating precedent and weakening term limits.
- Whether to explicitly state that trustees may return after time off.

Mr. Fletcher made a motion to adopt the proposed Board of Trustees edits with the following changes to Article IV, Section 3.

- 1. Change term limits from three successive terms to four successive four-year terms.**
- 2. Remove the "with the consent of the Board" waiver/extension language.**
- 3. Make corresponding adjustments throughout the section to reflect "four" terms where applicable.**

Ms. Stroupe seconded the motion.

With no further discussion, **the motion passed.**

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Caldwell asked if there was any further business to come before the Board. There being none,

Mr. Fletcher moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Hall.

The meeting adjourned at 1:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Shawnya Gore, Secretary



Guyann Howe, Recording Secretary



Judge Jesse Caldwell, Chair

(College Seal)