

The Trustees in attendance: Rick Rieder, Ezdehar Abuhatab, Nicole Bearce, Ravi Bellur, Steve Creekmur, Lawrence Evans, Thomas Redburn, Trisha Scipio, Scott Sleyster, Ann Borowiec, and Jamey Verrilli.

Also present: Jennifer Da Silva, Maya Roth- Bisignano, Timeese Townes-Pratt, Mike Mann, Kelly Dowling, Lauren Vance, Caitlin Stillwell, Brendan Campbell, and John Powell.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mr. Rieder who noted that the meeting had been duly publicized, as required by law, in *The Star-Ledger* and *The Americano* with updated address information posted on the North Star Academy website.

Mr. Evans moved to approve the following minutes. Mr. Bellur seconded the motion:

- Approval of 2/2/26 Public Session Minutes
- Approval of 2/2/26 Executive Session Minutes

The trustees voted unanimously in approval.

Ms. Da Silva opened the meeting by sharing joy from our recent Leadership Development Retreat. After sharing a quick video of Jamey Verrilli's speech, she shared that 5 of our North Star Leadership received awards.

- Elementary Principal of the Year- Mariah Copeland, VES
- Middle School Principal of the Year- Nikki Jones, DTMS
- High School Principal of the Year- Mike Mann, WPHS
- Elementary DOO of the Year- Bria Antoine, FES
- Rookie Principal of the Year- Ebonee Johnson, LPHS

Lauren Vance then went on to present the Mid-Year Staff Survey (MYSS) results, noting a 93% participation rate across staff. She explained that the survey assesses school leadership, staff engagement and satisfaction, and intent to return. Ms. Vance reported increases in both staff satisfaction and engagement compared to the fall survey, indicating continued positive momentum across campuses. She highlighted strong leadership performance, with 95% of staff responding positively about principals and notable gains among Directors of Operations. Feedback emphasized leaders' responsiveness to staff input and the strength of operational systems that allow teachers to focus on instruction. Ms. Vance also shared that intent to return increased from 65% to 76%, with staff citing their connection to students and sense of impact as key reasons for staying. She closed her presentation by explaining how survey results are used to inform leadership development, staffing projections, and individualized retention conversations.

Ms. Vance concluded by asking the board if they had any questions.

Mr. Rieder inquired about the key factors driving the improvement in this year's staff survey results. Ms. Vance attributed the positive shift to a combination of enhanced compensation,

stronger overall benefits packages, and the impact of effective, high-quality leadership across campuses, all of which have contributed to increased staff satisfaction at North Star.

Mr. Sleyster then asked what areas the organization is focused on improving for the coming year. Ms. Vance acknowledged that maintaining fully staffed buildings remains an ongoing challenge, particularly in managing coverage during staff leaves of absence without overburdening existing team members. Ms. Dowling added that the organization is placing a greater emphasis on strengthening its secondary staff pipeline to ensure more consistent and sustainable coverage during periods of need.

Ms. Da Silva then transitioned the board to a presentation by our Director of College Counseling at Washington Park High School.

Ms. Caitlin Stillwell presented updates on College Access and the Class of 2026. She provided an overview of the Office of College Access and Success, emphasizing the comprehensive support provided to students and families, including 1:1 advising, financial aid workshops, college exposure opportunities, and seminar courses. She highlighted the network's low counselor-to-student ratio of 35:1 compared to the national average. Ms. Stillwell discussed the integration of artificial intelligence into the college application process, noting its use in supporting research, essay development, and resume refinement. She also introduced the Backrs platform, currently being piloted with juniors through grant funding, and noted the goal of securing continued funding for the following school year.

Ms. Caitlin Stillwell also highlighted several individual student stories to illustrate the impact of North Star's college access and support systems. These examples demonstrated the range of post-secondary pathways available to students, including both four-year college enrollment and career-based programs. She shared how personalized advising, strong relationships with counselors, and ongoing support from multiple teams help students navigate changes in their plans and make informed decisions about their futures. These stories underscored the importance of a collaborative, "village" approach in supporting students from application through enrollment and beyond, reinforcing North Star's commitment to ensuring students persist in their chosen paths after graduation.

Ms. Stillwell shared strong Early Decision outcomes, including a 64.1% acceptance rate, 101 acceptances across 42 colleges and universities, and an average of \$78,000 in grants and scholarships awarded per student. She also highlighted that QuestBridge scholars earned a combined \$2.9 million in scholarships. Additionally, she discussed the growing partnership with Bucknell University, which has already resulted in four enrolled students for Fall 2026. Throughout the presentation, Ms. Stillwell emphasized the importance of collaboration across College Access, Alumni Success, and Student Support teams to ensure students persist through college. She concluded with an overview of key milestones leading up to Decision Day on May 1 and shared individual student success stories that illustrated the impact of these supports.

Ms. Stillwell concluded by inviting questions from the board. There weren't any questions.

Mr. Rieder asked for a motion to go into executive session. A motion was made to move to an executive session by Ms. Scipio and seconded by Mr. Verrilli. The trustees voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:25 pm to discuss legal matters, personnel and real estate.

At the end of the executive session, a motion was made by Mr. Verrilli and then seconded by Ms. Scipio to return to the public session. The trustees voted unanimously to return to the public session at 7:40 pm.

Ms. Da Silva opened the floor to public comments. There weren't any members of the public in attendance.

Ms. Da Silva then presented the following Personnel items to the board for approval:

- *2.1 NSA Personnel Report*

A motion was made by Mr. Verrilli and seconded by Ms. Scipio to approve the personnel items. The trustees voted unanimously to approve.

Ms. Da Silva then presented the following Finance and Facilities items to the board for approval:

- *3.1 FY26 Revised Budget*

A motion was made by Ms. Scipio and seconded by Mr. Evans to approve the finance and facilities items. The trustees voted unanimously to approve the financial resolutions.

Ms. Da Silva shared Administrative Resolutions for board approval.

- *4.1 Approve SY26-27 Employee Handbook*
- *4.2 Approve Food Vendor Renewal Contract*

A motion was made by Ms. Scipio and seconded by Mr. Creekmur to approve the administrative items. The trustees voted unanimously to approve the administrative resolutions.

A motion was made by Mr. Evans and seconded by Ms. Bearce to uphold the recommendations of the Student Hearing Committee.

A motion was made to adjourn by Ms. Scipio and seconded by Mr. Evans to adjourn the board of trustees meeting. The trustees voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:47p.m.

THE NEXT BOARD MEETING will be held at **18 Washington Pl. on May 18th , 2026.**