Career Academy of South Bend, Inc.
Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors
5800 Nimtz Parkway, South Bend
August 25, 2026

Directors Attending:	John DeSalle, Larry Garatoni, Chad Hartzell, Janet Scott
Directors Online:	Jacqueline Barton, Iris Hammel, Gregg Maggioli, Rachel Savoie
Directors Absent:	Michael Garatoni
Staff Attending:	Jeremy Lugbill, Candy Van Buskirk, Laurie Gregory, Dave Ebersol, Mark Norton, Anita Wigfall, Anna Cooper, Ally Jeter, Craig Fisher
Staff Online:	Maria Reilly, Sybil Snyder, Amy Ryan, Vincent Liew, Jane Schlichter, Sara Timm, Steph Ebersol
Others Online:	Charles Loeser, Steve Wheatley, Tiana Batiste-Waddell

A. Call to Order. Larry Garatoni called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm.

B. Approval of Agenda

C. Approval of Minutes. The minutes of the most recent (July 13, 2026) meeting were approved.

D. Consent Agenda. Larry presented the following for approval as consent agenda items:

1) Financial statements and expenditures reports for June and July
2) Electronic Board Meeting Policy
3) Parent & Family Engagement Policy
4) 2026-27 Handbooks
    i. Staff Handbook
    ii. Transportation Handbook
    iii. Family Engagement Handbook
5) 2026-27 Safety Plans
    i. Central Office
    ii. Success Academy Primary School
    iii. Success Academy At Boys & Girls Club
    iv. Career Academy Middle School
    v. Career Academy High School
    vi. Portage School of Leaders
6) Adult Meal Prices for 2026-27 school year

The consent agenda items were approved unanimously.

E. Mission Moment: African-American History Club Trip To New York City.

Two students (Amara and Jackson) expressed their appreciation for the school's African-American History Club trip to New York in July to participate in the national African-American history competition. Five team members were on the trip. The club earned an invitation to the national competition by winning in the regional competition in South Bend. The New York competition involved teams from across the country. In addition to the competition, there were presentations on African-American history such as the origin of the Juneteenth holiday, Black business leaders, and the formation of the 100 Black Men organization (which financed the competition). Spending four days in New York, there was time to enjoy the city including a Michael Jackson play and a dinner cruise. Larry asked if they had plans for careers. Jackson said he wanted a business career, marketing and finance. Amara said she wanted to be a technological journalist. Larry said those are awesome goals and the Board is proud to have such students.

F. Staff Introductions. Candy introduced Ally Jeter, who became the new principal at SABGC at the end of last academic year, and Craig Fisher, taking over as principal of Career Academy High School after 30-some years as an athletic director, assistant principal, and principal in Wisconsin. With us via Zoom is Amy Ryan, who's not new to us but is taking over as the head of school at Portage School of Leaders. Not with us tonight but an important new member of our team is Tracy Ripley, our coordinator for title and grants compliance.

G. Principal Reports.

1) Success Academy At Boys And Girls Club. Ally said a major initiative at the beginning of the school year has been the opening of the Bethel College Lab School for kindergarten in a dedicated classroom on the Bethel campus. Our teachers lead the instruction but Bethel education majors are providing extra instruction while meeting their student teaching requirements and learning every day by seeing professors and licensed teachers interacting with students.

Classes are going well both at the lab school and the main SABGC building. Three new teachers have been hired, they're making an impact. We've had good parent involvement, building from last year, which is especially important for a Title 1 school. We've done the beginning-of-year diagnostic testing, which lets us know where we're starting and provides a map for needed instruction. Our Professional Learning Community collaboration is ongoing, teachers meeting weekly within grade levels and

across grade levels to understand what each student needs. We'll be doing more diagnostic testing throughout the year to obtain measures of student progress.

2) Success Academy Primary School. Sybil Snyder said there are grounds for three celebrations.

A. Two Grants and a Possible Third. The first celebration is for securing two sources of additional help for our students and the prospect of a third.

(i) We were approved as the partner school with the Martin Luther King Center for the grant they received for increasing literacy scores for some of our students who already attend the King Center after school. The students will get free tutoring and some family literacy outreach.

(ii) Additionally, Michelle Luna and Tutor ND will provide one-to-one in-school tutoring for some of our kids. This year is the pilot year: kindergarten and fourth grade students will be tutored, next year it will be second and third graders. This is through an IDOE grant to improve iREAD-3 scores. They'll also do some family literacy nights for us.

(iii) The third partnership, not yet secured, is a STEM integration grant. We'll find out next semester whether we receive it. Our goal is to become STEM certified.

B. PLC Progress. The second cause for celebration is our PLC progress. This summer we were able to take 12 staff, including some of the new teachers that we just hired and some non-instructional staff, to the Lincolnshire conference. We got a lot of buy-in and I think we're off to a great start with teams establishing norms, setting their goals, and doing some of that work that's foundational for a successful PLC year.

C. New Hires. We also have reason to celebrate with our new hires.

(i) Amanda Martin, formerly a second grade teacher, has become our instructional coach. She's off to a great start supporting teachers and training our instructional assistants in UFL, a phonics program. They've worked on bolstering up classroom libraries and modeled lessons.

(ii) We have an AI coach, Carrie Marks, shared with BGC. She's been helping with tech support and new teacher support, trying to help them learn about how they can use AI tools to become more efficient and innovative.

(iii) We've hired a new family engagement specialist, Jeffonia Jones, new to us, but she was at the Portage School last year. She and I have a meeting tomorrow to set up our first semester parent involvement. And returning on the team is Jo Carroll, our maker manager, who also serves as our STEM facilitator in our STEM guiding coalition team.

D. Culture. We're working hard on culture. An important aspect is creation of guiding coalition teams. There are five: (i) ELA; (ii) STEM/Math; (iii) school-wide expectations; (iv) school-wide behavior; (v) and social-emotional. For each of those guiding coalition teams, there's a facilitator. They have a common agenda. We have those meetings scheduled out. We had the launch on Thursday. Already they are making waves, thinking about new and innovative ways to improve our school culture, our student outcomes for academics and behaviors.

E. Library. The LaSalle Branch Library reopened this year, and we're very glad. So we're going to continue with the work of the library cards and our library visits for our students. The library has started an after-school snack program. It's a great place for kids to go after school.

3) Career Academy Middle School. Maria Reilly said the turn-out was the best ever (120 families) for the Grade 6 and new Middle School orientation. Turn-out was also the highest ever for Back To School Night, with 341 families (of roughly 450 total) participating.

A. Reading Pilot. CAMS has been selected to participate in an IDOE-approved adolescent literacy pilot with Amira Learning, provider of a software program used in many states and internationally, combining reading science and an AI Learning Agent.[1] This is by an "outcomes-based contract" - meaning we don't pay anything and the vendor is paid (by the State) only if targeted growth is achieved. There are three vendors participating in the pilot, we named Amira as our preference and we were paired with our preference. It is an AI personal tutor, her name is Amira, kind of like every student will have their own Siri. Students wear headphones that are noise canceling and they speak into an attached microphone. Students will read passages into it and get live, personal, individualized feedback. Amira was originally designed for younger students but the IDOE is providing it to all our students who scored below proficiency. Other students, working with our AI coach, Brett Herring, will have a similar experience with Microsoft Reading Coach.

B. Attendance and Discipline. CAMS set a goal of 95% attendance for this year. Last year we were at 94%, which is high, but as of August 18 we met the 95% goal. We also set a goal of reducing the number of suspensions compared to this time last year by 10%, and so far we're meeting that goal. Since our enrollment has increased, the percentage is actually less.

C. Academics. Our teams are on target with academic planning. Beginning of year assessments have been completed, schedules have been adjusted to make sure

[1] See https://amiralearning.com/

that students are in the right place to get the supports that they need, and our tier three kids are scheduled into special interventions.

4) Career Academy High School. Craig Fisher began by thanking Geriann Druyoss for her tireless work, not limited to office hours, on the master schedule. Craig said he wants to meet with all high school teachers and other staff to hear from them what we do well here at Career Academy, what they're most proud of in working here, and where is there room for growth. Craig said the foundation for teaching is identifying essential standards, not just by grade, but by courses. That has already started and we aim to have the essential standards in all of our courses identified by October 5th. This week, this Friday, all of our teams will have their norms identified. We have our team leaders meet weekly on Wednesdays at 7:15 a.m. Departments meet bi-weekly during WIN and then staff meetings are 3:15. We're starting the discussions of what data is collected, not just in learning, but also behaviorally, because we want all staff to be a part of our professional learning communities. As I told our staff on Monday, we want you to focus on the skill, the rest of us will focus on the will, attendance, and behavior.

(5) Portage School of Leaders. Amy Ryan said PSOL opened the year with what we called "One School One Project" - a five-day fully analog, so pre-laptop rollout, school-wide problem-based learning experience for our kids. With the huge growth in enrollment this year from taking on Purdue Polytechnic High School kids, plus sharp growth in enrollment otherwise, we're at 83% over last year. So the focus for the beginning of our school year was how do we integrate these constituencies? We decided on a fully cross-curricular project. The challenge was to build a boat that your teacher can float in a cross-pinhook pond that is steerable and will hold their weight. This was an engineering challenge, an aesthetic challenge, a buoyancy challenge, and a materials challenge. It brought kids together, allowed their advisory groups to build connections with them, and introduced them to our project orientation.

This helped us set the stage for a Chromebook rollout. We changed our technology process to a check-in, check-out, beginning and end-of-day situation rather than having the kids take their laptops home.

Amy said if you were to walk around our school today, you would never be able to tell who was and was not previously with our school, who was new, who was returning. Those groups are still fully integrated. Which is to the full credit of our teaching team with a couple of really strategic hires from the PPHS team. The result was that we have a much more integrated community than we were expecting to see in these early weeks.

Goals for the first quarter include a more robust rollout of our Learning Management System, Headrush.[2] We began onboarding staff through customized

[2] See https://www.headrushlearning.com/why-headrush/.

professional development with a Headrush contractor, which was very helpful tool. Our PLC focus is creation of a Grade 9-10 team and a Grade 11-12 team and getting those teams working. We also need to codify and improve our durable skills methodology.[3]

H. Enrollment, Admissions and Marketing Update. Vincent Liew, Chief Marketing Officer, reported that as of August 11, enrollment was 1876, ten more than as budgeted. Career High was at 492 (including 73 virtual), Career Middle at 472 (including 19 virtual), Success Primary at 608, SABGC (including the new Bethel location) at149 and PSOL at 155. Applications for June and July were up substantially (33%) from last year.

I. Superintendent's Report. Candy thanked the tech team for the extensive work needed to get the year to a smooth start.

J. Other Business/Public Comment. Larry asked if anyone wanted to bring up any other issues. Tiana Batiste-Waddell said the network has a responsibility to move beyond collecting data and use it to drive measurable improvement. She recommended conducting a comprehensive Network Needs Assessment to identify achievement gaps, evaluate the effectiveness of current programs and practices, examine resource allocation, and establish measurable improvement goals, using data to drive strategic decisions, accountability, interventions, and continuous improvement for every student, ensuring inclusiveness to students who are BIPOC (Black, indigenous, or People of Color). Larry Garatoni thanked Tiana for her interest and said we will get back to you.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Charles M. Loeser, Secretary

[3] See https://americasucceeds.org/the-durable-skills-advantage-framework-a-guide-for-educators-and-policymakers.