

**WASHINGTON STATE OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP BOARD MEETING
OCTOBER 3, 2023, 1–3 P.M., AT MICROSOFT OR MICROSOFT TEAMS
MEETING MINUTES**

The Board of Directors of the Washington State Opportunity Scholarship (WSOS) convened on October 3, 2023, in person and via Microsoft Teams. The meeting was publicized as available to the public on the WSOS website.

Board members in person: Brad Smith (Chair), Julie Sandler, Miller Adams, Gary Rubens, Jane Park

Board members virtual: Diane Cecchettini, and Patrick Smith

Board members not present: Latisha Hill, Mike Wilson

Additional attendees: Gina Breukelman, Jane Broom, Jolenta Coleman Bush, Aileen Miller, Kimber Connors, Javana Polenska, Nancy Long, Camille Reynaud, Courtney Chen, Dena Parmer, Faye Alarcon, Francisca Mejas Campos, Genevieve Geiger, Hayley Schaefer, Jess Tholmer, Jessica Monger, Jillian Luis, Johnathan Luster, Juan Carlos Gomez, Kendyl Puhan, Lauren Pack, Lindzey Lien, Lisa Magennis, Lyanne O'Connell, Nick Khamphilom, Niki Cramer, Rachel Wyers, Sam Svilar, Tara Warming, Tori Campbell, Arian Ariaye, Paul Francis

Meeting Called to Order

Brad Smith, Chair, called the Board meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Javana Polenska noted that there was a correction to the minutes. On page six of the preread packet, the minutes state there is no contract or RFP needed. There is no RFP, but we will directly contract with the foundation. We will strike "contract or" from the minutes.

Board Action: Diane Cecchettini moved that the minutes of the June 21, 2023, Board meeting be approved with the amendment Polenska noted. Miller Adams seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

Mission Moment: Scholar Opportunity Story

Johnathan Luster, WSOS Programs Director, introduced Arian Ariaye who is in his third year at the University of Washington. Ariaye said he came to the UW with an associate degree from Green River College. He said he was born in Afghanistan and moved to Turkey with his family when he was nine years old. He has been in Washington for four and one-half years. Ariaye said he was very stressed about how he would pay for college. He said that because of WSOS, he was able to work less, focus on his studies, and decrease the pressure on himself and his parents. Ariaye said he has been able to inspire his younger siblings and others like him to pursue higher education. Ariaye said he often talks to his WSOS mentor about the challenges he faces. His mentor, who is also a first-generation student, shares what they have overcome, and this was a big help during his time at the UW. Ariaye knows that to get into medical school, he must push himself in research and extra activities. He said he has been very involved with the WSOS industry and career panels. He said he has attended career panels and tours at Children's Hospital, Bristol Myers Squibb and he learned about the different options he has in the medical field.

Brad Smith asked if there were any questions.

Cecchettini asked about Ariaye's path to medical school and his dream clinical practice. Ariaye said he is preparing to take the MCAT next year by doing thirty practice questions each day. He said his dream is to be a successful practitioner but also to be a hope for others like him because there is so much misrepresentation of his culture. He said he is interested in family medicine, internal medicine, or pediatrics. Gary Rubens asked how Ariaye heard about the scholarship. Ariaye said he came to the US in his sophomore year and did not know English. He said he went to every meeting he could to help him with his English. Ariaye learned about WSOS when his high school counselors shared resources and scholarship opportunities. Brad Smith thanked Ariaye for enthusiastically sharing his story and for spreading the word about WSOS.

Public Comment

No one signed up for public comment.

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ED Corner

Polenska reviewed our intended impact and four key priorities. Polenska said the metrics have been static from our last few meetings. She stated that the progress or measures for this current academic year have had incremental changes toward our goals. We have been able to do a lot of promotional work this past year due to the Boeing funding, but some Scholars are not completing their FAFSA, making them ineligible for our scholarship. The Awards team will continue to focus on the eligibility of Scholars. The Programs team will continue to focus on Scholar persistence and will also focus on participation and engagement. External Affairs continues to be in the community to spread the word about WSOS. Fundraising is in the quiet phase of a campaign. We have been hampered by the lack of frontline fundraisers and have made adjustments in the revenue goal as well as a small change in our focus on communities outside of the Puget Sound region. Polenska said the last metric is around being a preferred workplace. These metrics are identical to where they were last year, so, we will not adjust this goal and will continue to focus on it.

Polenska said we have just started our academic year, so we do not have many metrics yet. She gave a high-level overview of the current work. She said the Awards team is building toolkits and solutions to ensure Scholars and their families understand how to navigate the application process. Polenska said we continue to make sure current Scholars understand processes to maximize their scholarships. We are continuing to watch the changes to FAFSA closely. She said the Programs team is busy onboarding Scholars. Scholar Leads are talking to students and helping them acclimate to their campus and our programming. Polenska said we are currently recruiting and launching our Skills that Shine industry mentorship program. We continue to target Scholars who are often furthest away from opportunities and try to engage them in our programming. She said that External Affairs is working on visibility and has made plans for Kimber Connors to engage with partners around the state. We are seeing some gains from a social media perspective as we have made some changes in our strategy and seen some immediate impacts. Polenska said there has been a lot of promotional work and new partnerships built. She said Development has changed the OpportunityTalks breakfast to a luncheon due to the impact of the pandemic on where people are working from in the hope it helps with attendance. Operations are focused on understanding the staff feedback in the summer culture survey and being responsive to what they are asking for. Polenska said that teams are starting work on the legislative report, and we should have an updated report on our metrics and accomplishments for the year in early December.

Adams asked how the back-to-office work is impacting operations and culture. Polenska said that we have been back in the office in a hybrid situation for quite a while. She said some staff have concerns about the additional waves of COVID, but we have settled into the hybrid work. Brad Smith asked what the hybrid policy is. Polenska said we are in the office two days a week. She said each team has one assigned day, and then everyone selects one more day each week to be in the office.

Rubens asked if we have thought about smaller events rather than just our large OpportunityTalks event. Polenska asked Camille Reynaud, Development Director, to answer this. Reynaud said we have three campaign events planned with individuals on the campaign steering committee. There are two cocktail parties and a Hot Topic Dinner party. She said that next year, we are hoping to host some events in eastern Washington to better engage partners in other parts of the state.

Polenska shared WSOS key wins for the quarter, which are the WSOS Foundation being incorporated and the 501c3 application having been filed. She said another win is the work staff have done on their strategic planning. Polenska said we have sustained promotions and brand-building activities, and it has had a positive impact. She said our last key win is that we survived without Connors while she was on maternity leave.

Polenska shared four challenges we are currently facing. She said the first one is culture work and balancing speed and intention. Polenska said a key takeaway is that, as directors, we need to communicate better with staff. She said that we have had a lot of turnover and staff are feeling the impact of that. We have seven open roles, three of which were newly created. Polenska said another challenge is the financial reporting and reconciliation that 501 Commons does. We are working closely with their team as we start the budgeting process, but it continues to be a body of work that lags. The last challenge Polenska talked about was the difficulty in finding good candidates for the controller position.

Brad Smith thanked Polenska for leading the organization as the interim executive director. He said she has not shied away from any of the challenges or opportunities.

Polenska introduced Paul Francis, Executive Director of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). Francis shared that he was a legislative staffer who helped write the bill that created WSOS, and that

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he is excited to see how the program has grown. Francis shared the SBCTC vision statement and then reviewed the SBCTC strategic plan goals. He shared that a major focus is getting students not only in the door but on the path toward a degree or flexible career-training options that are responsive to the needs of businesses and industries. Francis said that in 2013, the legislature adopted a higher education goal that at least 70% of Washington adults ages 25-44 will have a postsecondary credential by 2023. He said we are at 60% if you include associate degrees, and we have gone backward during the pandemic. Brad Smith asked what the number was in 2013 when the goal was set. Francis said it was in the 50s, so we have made a little bit of progress.

Francis stated that some of the challenges we are seeing are enrollment, the fiscal health of our colleges, leadership transitions across our system, and workforce shortages in all of our colleges. Francis said that community and technical colleges are underfunded compared to other states. Francis said that Washington does not have a college-going culture. He said that even though we think of ourselves as a highly educated state, we do a good job of importing people who have been educated elsewhere. He said that Washington ranks low in FAFSA completion; we are usually ranked 48th or 49th in the country, even though we have one of the best state student financial aid programs in the country. Francis said that the number of high school graduates will not increase from 2019 to 2037. He said we cannot meet state workforce goals by relying on high school graduates. Francis said we have to think about how we serve incumbent workers with some college or no degree. He said that there is growing skepticism about the value of higher education. Patrick Smith asked if there is anything state-specific about our FAFSA that would make it more complicated for a Washington student to complete. Francis said they have had a lot of discussions about why it is that Washington ranks so low in FAFSA completion, and there is no easy answer. He said the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and other groups have tried to dig into that question. Francis said we don't know the reason, but we need to address it at the local level rather than at a state level. Connors asked if there are specific states that are usually in the top five and if there is anything notable that they are doing to cultivate a college-going culture. Francis said that Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arizona are all states that rank higher, but there does not seem to be a specific reason as to why. Francis said he could send the rankings if people would like to see them. Julie Sandler said there are many Washington Round Table discussions about what Washington state is not doing well and what is being done in states that have actually climbed up the rankings most aggressively. She said the takeaway they all have is that it cannot be done at the state level. She said there have to be a lot of local stakeholders working in unison.

Francis said he has had conversations with the head of DSHS, along with Mike Meotti from WSAC, about auto-enrollment for FAFSA for those who qualify for various state or federal programs. He said that Senator Drew Hanson has been pushing for this legislatively, but it got caught up in bureaucratic red tape. Francis said he believes that until we auto-qualify people, we will continue to have this problem. Brad Smith said that would just get them through the financial aid process. He asked if Francis believes that is sufficient to change the absence of a college-going culture. Brad Smith said that it feels like a broader issue than just the ease of applying for financial aid. Francis agreed and said that it solves how to get some money for college but not why someone needs to go to college.

Patrick Smith asked if there is good county-level data on this. He asked if there is a divide along the Cascade Mountains as to the opinion about attending college. Francis said that there are many immigrants and refugees in the greater Seattle area who struggle with the FAFSA or do not trust the government. He said it is a broad, statewide issue, and that is why we historically rank 48th or 49th. He said his colleagues at WSAC can get granulated data for the Board if desired.

Francis talked about some opportunities we have in Washington. He said we have a recognized innovative Community and Technical College sector. Francis said we were one of the first states in the country to offer four-year degrees on our campuses. He said we are leading the way in free and low-cost textbooks for students. Washington is a net importer of college graduates, which is an enrollment opportunity. Francis said we have good collaboration with business, labor, non-profit, and four-year university partners that are essential for getting things done in our state. He said we have a dedicated revenue source through the critically important Workforce Education Investment Account (WEIA). We have the best state student financial aid program in the country.

Francis said that enrollment started to drop ten years ago in both headcount and FTE. He said we did see a small increase last year, but we have a long way to go to meet the 70% goal. He said we have seen an enrollment decline in the transfer area, and the professional and technical enrollment dropped because of the pandemic. Francis reviewed headcount by race and said the numbers held firm over the last ten years but added that the numbers should be going up because those are the fastest-growing populations in our state. He said that college enrollment has declined at almost the same rate for men and women. He added that there is a notable decline for those under the age of twenty, and that group makes up a lot of the transfer population. He said that this impacts four-year colleges because 40% of their graduates are

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from a community or technical college. Francis said there are fewer part-time students, and they attribute that to older working adults not enrolling. He said the number of students receiving need-based aid has jumped recently and believes it is because more people have financial needs. He said a success is the dual credit programs like Running Start. Francis said that in 2021, they are authorized to offer a BS in computer science due to the support of Amazon, Microsoft, and others. There are over 150 baccalaureate programs at all thirty-four colleges. The apprenticeship programs have had a little bit of growth, and SBCTC is doing a lot of work to figure out how to grow these programs statewide. Francis said that they are focused on guided pathways for improving first-fall to second-fall retention because it doesn't do any good to get people in the door if they do not get any credentials.

Francis said the state board is focused on the 1.12M Washingtonians who have some college and no degree. He said this issue is very layered, and we need to look at the root issue as to why they left. Francis said they are reviewing their prior learning assessment policies of college credit for military or professional experience, and to standardize and expand the policies. He said they are trying to build more micro-credential and micro-pathway opportunities that may ladder up into a certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree, and beyond. Francis said they are looking at tailored student support like advising, counseling, mentoring, and tutoring. He said that Western Governors University's enrollment has been booming in the last decade, and there are things we can learn from them about competency-based education. He said other opportunities they are looking at are increased outreach to K-12 students because many have never been to a college campus and don't know the resources available. Francis said there is an unbelievable increase in students who are suffering from food insecurity, housing insecurity, and mental health issues, which were all worsened by the pandemic.

Adams asked if this is a public presentation. Francis said it is open and it can be shared.

Brad Smith asked if the shortfall in enrollment in community and technical colleges is the single, biggest problem that needs to be solved. He added that if so, this is not fully reflected in the strategic priorities and mission statement for SBCTC. Francis said he would be happy to dialogue about this more. Brad Smith said this is a conversation we need to have because AI is going to transform workforce needs and opportunities between now and every year after, and this was not mentioned in the presentation. He said this makes involvement in these kinds of programs more essential than ever if this state is going to be a place where the people who live here are able to prosper. Brad Smith added that, in some ways, the economy is globally driven from this corner of the world, and it is going to create more meaning for people to go to community and technical colleges and get more credentials in new ways. He added that we live in a place where we are almost last in the country for people to perceive how important this is.

2023-24 Academic Year Programs

Johnathan Luster, Programs Director, shared that Maximum Millett, a previous meeting's Mission Moment Scholar, received his credentials and is working as an engineering services fuel technician. Luster stated that Millett volunteered as a mentor for Skills that Shine. Luster said that participation and engagement were low last academic year, but impact was high. He said we exceeded every metric target we had about the impact of our program. He said that the biggest opportunity for growth is the Career and Technical Scholar Lead program, which had a goal of 75% participation but only 39% engaged last year. Despite lower than targeted participation, he said that 86% of those involved said their Lead helped them. Graduate (GRD) programming exceeded engagement, and 87% of those engaged said programming helped them feel more prepared to be a nurse practitioner. Luster said they have evaluated the tasks that are expected of the Scholar Leads and made them more relevant and timelier in ways that will help scholars even more. He said we changed our philosophy and now have some non-negotiable tasks like making a welcome call to their Scholars. Luster said we believe this will help Scholars engage with their Lead.

Jane Park asked if the source of low engagement is that there is a disparity between Scholar Leads. Luster said this is not a core issue, but it is part of the problem. He said that WSOS staff have a close relationship with all the Scholar Leads, which gives us a sense of how things are going. Luster added that we do not know things from the Scholars' perspectives, but with some of the changes, we will have a better sense of what is really happening.

Luster said that we have goals of closing opportunity gaps based on race, where Scholars live, and income. He said the BaS program was just under the goals of what we wanted to see, and the CTS and GRD programs have a lot of improvement needed. Luster said this will be addressed through more Scholar outreach, segmented emails, and calling them more often. He said we want to be better in touch with students who are furthest from opportunity. Luster said we want 60% of eligible practicum sites to receive the stipend, which is up from 50% last year. Luster said that based on data of the importance of early intervention in someone's two-year journey, we will only have new Scholars eligible to participate in Skills that Shine. He said we have changed our customer service response strategy to get back to Scholars

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sooner when we hear of a problem. Luster said we are going to call every BaS-eligible Scholar and have a fellow student share the benefits of doing the program. He said that this year, we are only going to do one cycle of CTS. We are reducing from two cycles to one in the spring cycle, which was more popular.

Gina Breukelman said that in the past, there has been an imbalance of mentors and students. Luster said that this year, we are trending towards having an even number of mentors and mentees. He said we do not want to have people raise their hands to participate and not have a match so we have been working to align our recruitment with need.

Luster said that we are trying two new programs this year. He said we talked to every career center at every college in the state and had student focus groups to find out what they are not getting on their campus. Luster said we learned that there is a gap in students knowing where to look for industry-specific jobs other than using general search engines. That is one thing we will address, and the other is how to negotiate salary. We will offer workshops with experts to address these topics, and we are also trying a new job board. We are piloting this with CTS, and if it goes well, we will expand it to BaS and GRD.

Rubens asked why only 50% of practicum sites are accessing the stipend. Luster said that our students' practicum is at really small clinics and some at large hospitals like Harborview. He said the larger clinics and hospitals are less interested in receiving the stipend. Rubens asked if we have tried other things to raise the percentage of sites accessing the stipend. Luster said that we have seen a challenge of finding the person in a large place who signs the paperwork so we can give them the money we want to give them. He said we have made traction there. Luster said that we can investigate the dollar amount and if it is even necessary for these larger sites.

2024 Legislative Priorities

Jessica Monger, External Affairs Director, said that because of our statutory direction, we make sure we are connecting high school students to post-secondary credentials. So, while Francis' data was focused on ages 25 – 44, we are focused on 70% of students receiving credential attainment by age 26. Monger said that the state is really far off from its goals, and Covid made it worse. She said that only 40% of the class of 2021 have enrolled in any type of post-secondary education in the fall after graduation. Monger said that it is less than 1/3 for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, which is of grave concern when you consider how hard it is to get a student re-engaged when they've become disengaged after high school. Monger said that high school graduation rates are up, but their post-secondary enrollment is down. She said we know that 70% of jobs require some sort of post-secondary training or education, and for many of them, it is some type of STEM training. Monger said we also see the wage gap growing and that it is exacerbated by the fact that the sectors paying the highest wages are software, aerospace, hospitals, and construction, but you see a big gap in who has access to those careers. Monger said that there was a recent report that said something like the top 10% of households in Washington are earning twelve times what the lowest 10% of households are earning. She said it is really troubling if you look at who is not accessing those careers, which is mainly women and people of color. Monger said the majority of those we support at WSOS are students of color, low-income, and women, but it can only help if we get to them.

Monger said that state revenue is up, and since the budget passed in April, it's up \$1.6B for the four-year forecast. She said we see the economy continuing to grow, but we are worried about who we are leaving behind. Monger said that she and her colleague have traveled well over 3,000 miles around Washington promoting WSOS for the past nine months. She said that we hear optimism from students and that one study shows 90% of Washington students want a college degree. But when you survey school staff, less than half believe that students are aspiring for post-secondary credentials. Monger said this is alarming because students need access to information, and if less than half of the school staff believe the students are on the path there, we worry about how students figure out the path to college. Monger said this is why we have to be in the communities around our state sharing about financial aid, career-connected learning, and other opportunities earlier in student's academic process. Monger said that thanks to the grant from Boeing, we have been able to be a tool to combat the concerns that high school students have about post-secondary education. She said that thanks to Sandler's connections with the Washington School Counselors Association (WSAC), we have developed new partnerships.

Monger said we have a lot of changes in key positions in Olympia for the upcoming session. She said that we do not have a bill, so there is no reason to make any asks. Monger said this means we have to make authentic connections to legislators outside of the session and make sure their constituents are hearing about WSOS so we can build new champions. She said that since WSOS was created, there are a lot of other grants and opportunities that our partners are chasing, and this makes us compete for their time. Monger said we need clear messaging about community needs and workforce challenges, and corporate folks in every community know about WSOS so that legislators hear about us in

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different ways and read about us in the media. Monger said this is one of the reasons we will have more events in eastern Washington. She said we need to build the brand using a community-focused approach and connect with key folks across the state. She said there is an opportunity with government partnerships and meetings with tribes to use WSOS for local workforce development. Monger said our big goal is government partnerships and relationships outside of the Puget Sound region. We need the Board's help with introductions and new relationships to position WSOS as a thought leader. Monger said we want folks to know that we are doing innovative work to help solve our enrollment crisis.

Adams asked what pathway is being used for the tribal opportunity. Monger said that a few years ago in the Legislature, they amended our statute. The amendment said that a city, county, or tribal government can invest in WSOS and receive the state match with reserved seats specific to their program needs. She said it even gives them some authority, within the Board's selection criteria, to further narrow a program to support specific workforce needs. Adams asked if she had talked to Leonard Forsman about the tribal opportunity. Monger said she met with him right before COVID. Adams said Forsman is the chairman of the Squamish tribe, on the Board of Regents at the University of Washington, the President of the Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest, and on the Board of the Tribal Leaders Congress on Education. Adams suggested setting up another meeting because he is really involved with education. Connors agreed that it was time to reach out to him again.

Sandler thanked Monger for her presentation and said there are themes that keep coming up about how poor Washington is doing about reaching students with messaging about the FAFSA and the Washington College Grant. She said that all of these data points are so hard to get out in front of students. Sandler applauds the focus on physical presence at schools and said she is happy to join in person as we approach this initiative and believes other Board members would be willing to join, too, because this piece is vital.

Brad Smith asked if we should be considering a more combined campaign that brings together everybody who has this interest in enrollment and offering scholarships. He said we are not competing against other scholarship programs. Monger said there is an opportunity to get more thought leaders together. She said the message is disjointed, and we need a unified message about this pathway and all the opportunities that can get a student there. Brad Smith asked if we make more headway with the Legislature if we have an ask. He said maybe we take this concept and mold it into an ask so that Monger has something to bring to legislators.

Adams suggested we ask them to support an event in their district that we could organize and manage. Brad Smith said this would be good, and we need to give thought to how we pull together all the similar state programs. He said that we could ask them to appropriate some of the \$1.6B towards something like this. Monger said this is something we should discuss. Breukelman said we could include PFL, WA STEM, and others. She added that teachers, school counselors, parents, and students are getting emails from all the different organizations, and a unified message would be helpful for them. Adams said we could convene a meeting of the different groups in key legislators' districts and ask that the legislator make an appearance.

Finance and Program Administrative Update

Patrick Smith said the F&I Committee materials from September 6 are behind Tab F of the pre-read. Patrick Smith reviewed the Balance Sheet slide and said that as of June 30, we have total assets of \$123.2M, which is a 1% decrease from the previous quarter due in large part to a scholarship disbursement of \$6.7M. He said this was offset by investment gains of about \$4.6M. Patrick Smith said we had some private cash receipts during the quarter that boosted assets. There were net refunds of scholarships of about \$800K across all the programs. He said total liabilities as of the end of the quarter are \$37.4M, a decrease of 6% from the prior quarter. Patrick Smith said we have total net assets of about \$85.9M, which is a slight increase from the prior quarter end of about 2%.

Patrick Smith reviewed the income statement and said private revenues for the six months ending June 30 total \$1.1M. He said this is under budget by about \$500K, which is due mainly to staffing shortages. Patrick Smith said personnel expenses are slightly over budget. He said that professional fees are under budget due to grant writing fees. Patrick Smith said there may be some expense coding issues that 501 Commons is working on with WSOS.

Patrick Smith said that the BaS and CTS investment funds with the state returned 1.8% and 1.9%, respectively, for the quarter and 6.1% and 6.2%, respectively, for the past twelve months. The endowment funds returned 4.8% for Q2 and 13.5% for the trailing twelve months.

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Patrick Smith said that there is a redline copy of the Finance and Investment (F &I) Committee charter that has to be reviewed and approved every three years. There are minor changes like removing WA STEM from the language, instead inserting the general language about a qualified nonprofit, changing the wording from COO to ED, and adding finance/controller of the program administrator. The F&I Committee voted to recommend this updated version and would entertain a motion from the Board to approve the changes to the charter.

Patrick Smith said the committee also discussed how to stabilize the 501 Commons relationship, but that is an ongoing conversation. He said the committee also discussed possible changes to our treasury and cash management function. Patrick Smith said that the issue arose in the immediate aftermath of the bank failures that occurred in March but given the possible changes in our program administrator over the coming months, he suggested we table any further action until things are more settled with our program administration unless the Board feels strongly otherwise.

Board Action: Adams made a motion to approve the updated Finance and Investment Committee charter. Cecchettini seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

Polenska expressed gratitude to Aileen Miller for her support while Connors was on maternity leave. Connors expressed gratitude to the WSOS team for all of the work done in her absence.

Brad Smith asked if there were any questions, and there were none.

Executive Session

The meeting went into Executive Session at 2:50 p.m. to evaluate the performance of a public employee. The open meeting reconvened at 2:59 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dena Parmer