

March 11, 2026 Board Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Chair Blake Benson at 1:33 p.m. pm Wednesday, March 11, 2026. The meeting was held at the Board office, Curtis State Office Building, 1000 SW Jackson, Ste. 520, Topeka, Kansas. Proper notice was given according to the law.

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Blake Benson, Chair	Kathy Wolfe Moore	Neelima Parasker
	Alysia Johnston	Matt Crocker	Peter Johnston
	John Dicus	Pamela Ammar	

Approval of Minutes

Regent Ammar moved to approve the minutes of the Board's February 11, 2026, meeting; February 13, 2026, special meeting; and February 25, 2026, special meeting. Regent Crocker seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Introductions and Reports

Introductions

Chair Benson welcomed Regent Peter Johnston following his confirmation by the Kansas Senate, noting his immediate engagement. Chair Benson thanked the Governor's Office and the Senate for restoring the Board to full membership. Chair Benson also welcomed Dr. Matt Baker as the new President of Emporia State University and expressed enthusiasm for his leadership and collaboration in the year ahead.

Chancellor Girod introduced Arash Mafi as the University of Kansas's new Provost, Executive Vice Chancellor of the Lawrence campus, and Chief Academic Officer. He highlighted Provost Mafi's effective leadership as Executive Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, including improvements to student outcomes and curriculum, and expressed confidence in his continued leadership. Chancellor Girod announced that Jennifer Roberts was appointed Executive Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and that Dr. Rick Steele assumed an interim role in the Provost's Office, emphasizing the strength and continuity of KU's academic leadership team.

Report from the Chair

Chair Benson stated that he looked forward to the Pillar 3 presentations from the research universities on today's agenda and for a presentation by Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of Commerce David Toland, whom he recognized as a strong partner to higher education and economic development. He announced that the Regents and CEOs would host an evening reception with community and technical college leaders to strengthen collaboration across the system in support of Kansas families, students, and businesses.

Report from the President & CEO

President & CEO Blake Flanders reported on recent engagement activities amid a busy legislative session, highlighting a visit to Barton Community College where he participated in the college's leadership institute and met with campus leadership and board members. He noted Barton Community College's innovative efforts to serve students both on campus and at Fort Riley. President Flanders also discussed his participation in a podcast with Commissioner Randy Watson focused on college and career readiness, including expansion of dual and concurrent enrollment, challenges related to student preparedness and the upcoming enrollment cliff, and efforts to encourage FAFSA completion and college enrollment.

Report from Council of Faculty Senate Presidents

Rochelle Rowley, Faculty Senate President at Emporia State University, reported that the Council reviewed the International Baccalaureate program cut scores and recommended no changes. She also noted that the Council reviewed the credit for prior learning guidelines and likewise found no need for revisions.

Report from Students' Advisory Committee

Azward Zahraan, Students' Advisory Committee Chair, provided an update on recent Council activities. He reported that institutions are at various stages of student government elections, which will result in new student representatives joining the Council as current members conclude their service. He also noted productive engagement with community and technical college faculty and administrators and shared the Council's plan to collaborate with them to identify common, systemwide student needs for future student leaders.

Standing Committee Reports

Academic Affairs

Regent Alysia Johnston reported on recent academic program review activities following the cancellation of the February virtual meeting. She summarized presentations from Wichita State University Provost Monica Lounsbery and Vice Provost of Academic Affairs Ashley Jack on the academic year 2025 Program Review, noting that all 129 academic programs were evaluated against board-approved metrics and that recommendations will come to the full Board for review in May. She also noted updates on programs identified for action in the academic year 2024 review, with further updates to be provided to BAASC next spring. Regent Alysia Johnston further reported that KSU Provost Jesse Mendez presented a one-year follow-up on KSU's academic year 2025 program review and updates on programs identified for action in academic year 2024, with related recommendations expected to be presented to the Board in May or June.

Fiscal Affairs & Audit

Regent Dicus reported on the Fiscal Affairs and Audit Committee meetings, noting discussions were extensive, but agenda items were straightforward. The Committee reviewed updated internal audit plans from KU, WSU, and ESU for the current fiscal year and the year ahead. Members also received financial reports, including the Composite Financial Index and current-year budget plans from KSU, WSU, and KU. In addition, Jim MacMurray from the Kansas Development Finance Authority provided an update on system debt capacity and upcoming debt issues for three universities within the next 45 days.

Approval of Consent Agenda

Regent Alysia Johnston moved to approve the consent agenda. Regent Crocker seconded the motion. The motion carried and the following items were approved:

Fiscal Affairs & Audit

Act on Request to Approve Program Statement for HVAC Renovations to Robinson Center, KU

The Board accepted the program statement for the HVAC renovations to Robinson Center.

Act on Bond Resolution to Approve the Issuance of Revenue Bonds to Fund the Renovation and Equipping of the University Stadium and Authorize Execution of Various Other Documents in Connection Therewith, WSU

The Board approved the resolution authorizing the WSU President, the Board Chair and the President and CEO of the Board to execute documents necessary to accomplish the purpose of the resolution and the issuance of revenue bonds.

Act on Bond Resolution to Approve the Issuance of Revenue Bonds to Fund the Construction, Renovation, Development and Equipment of the Animal Science Arena, Agronomy Research and Innovation Center, Global Center for Grain and Food Innovation, KSU

The Board approved the resolution authorizing the KSU President, the Board Chair and the President and CEO of the Board to execute documents necessary to accomplish the purpose of the resolution and the issuance of revenue bonds.

Act on Request to Execute Master Lease Agreement, KSU

Kansas State University received approval to execute a Master Lease Agreement with K-State Real Estate Collaborations, Inc. (K-Rec) to transfer control of designated university spaces for sub-lease.

Technical Education Authority

Act on Program Proposal for AAS in Electrician, MATC

Manhattan Area Technical College received approval to offer a 34-credit hour Technical Certificate B and a 61-credit hour Associate of Applied Science in Electrician.

Act on Program Proposal for Technical Certificate in Medical Assistant, Washburn Tech

Washburn University Institute of Technology received approval to offer a 38-credit hour Technical Certificate B in Medical Assistant.

Act on New Promise Act Program, AAS in Electrician, MATC

The Board designated Manhattan Area Technical College's Associate of Applied Science in Electrician program as a Promise Act eligible program.

Act on New Promise Act Program, Technical Certificate in Medical Assistant, Washburn Tech

The Board designated Washburn University Institute of Technology's Technical Certificate in Medical Assistant program as a Promise Act eligible program.

Act on Excel in Career Technical Education Fees for Technical Certification in Medical Assistant, Washburn Tech

The Board approved the Excel in Career Technical Education fees for the Technical Certification in Medical Assistant.

Act on Reclassification of Courses from Tiered to Non-Tiered Status

The Board approved the reclassification of Introduction to Business, Principle of Marketing, and Principles of Management from tiered to non-tiered status.

Other Matters

Act on Appointment to Board Committee

The Board approved the appointment of Regent Peter Johnston to the Board Academic Affairs Standing Committee.

Consideration of Discussion Agenda

Other Matters

Legislative Update

Fred Patton, the Board's government affairs consultant, provided a legislative update. The Kansas Legislature entered the midpoint of the session and approached its first adjournment date, March 27. Committees were

advancing bills from the opposite chambers and transitioning toward floor debate. Mr. Patton noted progress on several KBOR nonbudgetary priorities related to scholarship adjustments, with two measures advancing through the Senate and expected to move to the Governor. He also discussed the higher education budget, explaining that both chambers passed their versions without changes and that conference committee negotiations had begun, with efforts continuing to secure favorable provisions amid broader pressure to reduce overall spending. Mr. Patton concluded by noting continued monitoring of legislation affecting higher education, including a forthcoming hearing on the Blueprint for Literacy bill, and emphasized that while activity remains high, no additional high priority issues had emerged.

Chair Benson requested President Muma present the academic unit naming request from WSU ahead of the Commerce Economic Development update prior to the Lieutenant Governor's arrival.

Act on Request to Name an Academic Unit, WSU

President Muma requested Board approval to name WSU's Department of Aerospace Engineering in recognition of Lynn and Sherry Nichols' longstanding partnership with the university and their significant contributions to the aerospace industry and the Wichita community. He highlighted the Nichols' leadership in revitalizing Yingling Aviation into a nationally recognized aerospace company headquartered in Wichita, as well as their deep involvement in industry advancement and community service. President Muma also noted their sustained support of WSU, including athletics, foundation leadership, and participation on presidential search committees. He emphasized that naming the department the Lynn and Sherry Nichols Department of Aerospace Engineering would honor their leadership, philanthropy, and enduring investment in the education and professional development of WSU students.

Regent Alysia Johnston moved to approve the naming of the Lynn and Sherry Nichols Department of Aerospace Engineering. Regent Ammar seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Receive Commerce Economic Development Update

Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of Commerce David Toland presented an overview of Kansas' recent economic development successes and outlined priorities for strengthening alignment between higher education and workforce needs. He reported that Kansas has attracted \$31.4 billion in private-sector investment and supported 84,000 new and retained jobs since 2019, crediting record-setting growth to stronger collaboration between the Department of Commerce and higher education institutions. Lieutenant Governor Toland emphasized shared priorities in talent development, research commercialization, and institutional transformation, while candidly identifying challenges related to speed, clarity, and coordination within the higher education system. He highlighted the need for clearer articulation of each institution's unique strengths; faster responsiveness to business and site selection inquiries; improved institutions' "front door" access for industry partners; and stronger integration of research, training, internships, and applied learning opportunities. As businesses do not understand the Board's service areas, they should be reconsidered as a hindrance to developing partnerships. Lieutenant Governor Toland encouraged institutions to adopt a more confident, collaborative, and business-oriented mindset to retain graduates, respond to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, and position Kansas for sustained population growth and long-term economic competitiveness.

(presentation on file with official minutes)

Receive Pillar III University Reports

Trishia Bergman, Associate Vice Chancellor for Economic Development, presented the KU Pillar 3 report, highlighting KU's substantial role in driving economic development and innovation across Kansas. She cited a fiscal year 2023 Lightcast study estimating KU's statewide economic impact at \$7.8 billion and emphasized record enrollment, retention, and graduation rates, along with a strong return on investment for graduates. Associate Vice Chancellor Bergman reported continued growth in research, with fiscal year 2025 expenditures reaching \$610 million—a 12% increase over the prior year—placing KU in the top 10% nationally for total and federally funded research. Research activity supported more than 5,700 researchers and generated significant in-state spending, including investments in small businesses.

Associate Vice Chancellor Bergman outlined KU's primary research and innovation engines in earth, energy, and environmental sciences; safety and security; and health and biomedical research. She highlighted nationally recognized programs, industry consortia, and successful commercialization efforts that have produced Kansas based startups, attracted private capital, and created high wage jobs. She also emphasized the KU Innovation Park's growth to 77 companies and more than 800 jobs, as well as new facilities and investor networks supported by federal and state partnerships. She concluded that sustained state investment in research, infrastructure, and computing capacity would further accelerate commercialization, job creation, and long-term economic impact for Kansas.

Jessica Gnad, Director of Economic Development, presented KSU's Fiscal Year 2025 progress under the Prosperity Pillar, noting strong alignment with the Kansas Framework for Growth, the Board of Regents' Building a Future plan, and KSU's NextGen strategy. She explained that the Office of External Engagement centrally coordinates research, industry partnerships, workforce development, and extension activities to ensure direct, measurable economic impact. In Fiscal Year 25, KSU reported 737 direct or retained jobs, \$21.5 million in leveraged capital investment, 74 businesses created or supported, and \$112.6 million in philanthropic support. Research expenditures totaled nearly \$280 million, placing KSU in the top 15% nationally among public research institutions.

Director Gnad highlighted the value of a KSU degree, with 97% of graduates employed or continuing education within six months, roughly two-thirds meeting or exceeding the Kansas median salary within one year, and 50% remaining in Kansas. She underscored the impact of key economic engines, including rural veterinary services, K-State Extension, K-State 105, and the Technology Development Institute, as well as new initiatives supported by the FORGE grant to strengthen corporate engagement and technology commercialization. She concluded by outlining future focus areas—advanced energy, biomanufacturing, grain and food innovation, biosecurity, and rural health transformation—and reaffirmed KSU's commitment to driving job growth, investment, and long-term economic prosperity across Kansas.

John Tomblin, Executive Vice President for Research and Industry and Defense Programs, presented WSU's Pillar 3 report, emphasizing that economic development is a core institutional priority driven by applied learning, defense partnerships, and industry engagement. He highlighted applied learning as WSU's distinguishing strength, with more than 13,000 students earning \$40 million through paid experiences that build workforce pipelines and support talent retention in Kansas. He reported significant regional impact stemming from NIAR and Innovation Campus growth, including 2,600 new jobs, \$680 million in new direct investment, and nearly \$2.5 billion in net economic gain, while noting these figures likely understate WSU's full impact.

Executive Vice President Tomblin underscored strong research performance, with more than \$630 million in awards and nearly \$500 million in expenditures, delivering substantial returns on state investment. He highlighted WSU's national leadership in aerospace and defense engineering, long-term Department of Defense programs generating billions of dollars within Kansas' supply chain, and major advances in digital engineering,

advanced manufacturing, and biomedical research. He concluded by emphasizing that the Innovation Campus model continues to attract industry, create high-wage jobs, and position WSU as a national leader in applied research and economic development.

(presentations on file with official minutes)

Discuss Board Member Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement and Act on Actual or Apparent Conflict

General Counsel John Yeary reviewed Board policy regarding conflict-of-interest disclosures by members of the Board of Regents. At the time of taking office and subsequently as the need arises, Board members must disclose certain transactional interests, memberships, and affiliations. The Board then reviews the disclosures and makes participation determinations in accordance with prescribed guidelines.

Regent Peter Johnston submitted his disclosures pursuant to Board policy. He serves on the governing board of a non-controlled affiliated corporation of an institution governed by the Board, as a Trustee of the KU Endowment Association. Staff recommended approving his continued service in this capacity, as such service is generally in line with the Board's mission and goals, would be unlikely to constitute an actual conflict of interest, and is more likely to be beneficial to the institution than potentially harmful to the Board of Regents or the System. Such continued service was recommended to be conditioned on Regent Johnston recognizing that his duty is first and foremost to the Kansas Board of Regents and if any actual conflict arises, that he will take appropriate action to manage or remedy the conflict.

Additionally, General Counsel Yeary recommended that Regent Johnston excuse himself from participating on behalf of the Board in matters involving or related to any contract or transaction between his law firm's clients and any educational institution governed, coordinated or regulated by the Board, and any matters impacting or relating to his spouse's employment at KU School of Medicine's Salina campus.

Regent Ammar moved to approve staff recommendations regarding the disclosed conflicts of interest. Regent Wolfe Moore seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Break

Chair Benson called for a break at 3:30 p.m. The meeting resumed at 3:40 p.m.

Work Session: Proposed Legislation

Members of the Board discussed newly filed House Bill 2798, which proposes significant statutory changes affecting the governance, autonomy, and oversight of Kansas' three research universities: KU, KSU, and WSU. General Counsel John Yeary outlined Board policy requiring Regents' approval of legislative proposals affecting the system and explained the Board's role in determining whether to support, oppose, or remain neutral on legislation not initiated by the Board. He then summarized the bill's key provisions, noting that it would grant research universities broad authority over contracting, procurement, property transactions, capital projects, and operations, while exempting the research universities from numerous state laws and administrative processes. Under the bill, Board oversight would apply only to policies involving the expenditure of state funds, with limited exceptions for life-safety requirements and inventory maintenance.

Board members asked extensive questions about the bill's scope and implications, particularly the distinction between state funds and state assets. Several members expressed concern that the bill would significantly reduce Board oversight over non-state funded activities, even when transactions involve state-owned assets, potentially allowing major decisions, such as property sales, leases, or private investment arrangements, to occur without Board review. Board members also questioned provisions limiting the Board's authority to convey

property to research university foundations, exempting research universities from appraisal and procurement requirements, and allowing different statutory treatment between research and regional universities. Several Regents highlighted risks related to accountability, public trust, maintenance obligations, long-term financial exposure, and the potential creation of uneven governance standards within the system.

While members of the Board acknowledged that portions of the bill could improve efficiency and reduce duplicative processes, they broadly agreed that the legislation, as drafted, represented a fundamental shift in governance by tying Board oversight solely to the expenditure of state funds. Multiple members described this change as a “game changer” that could undermine the Board’s stewardship responsibilities for public institutions and assets. The discussion concluded with a consensus that the Board should not support House Bill 2798 in its current form, citing significant concerns with Section 1, subsection B, and the unintended consequences of substantially diminished oversight.

Regent Peter Johnston moved that the Board decline to support the proposed legislation as presented. Regent Parasker seconded the motion. The Motion carried.

Adjournment

Chair Benson adjourned the meeting at 4:38 p.m.

Blake Flanders, President and CEO

Blake Benson, Chair