

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

Holyoke Community College

Special Session - Saturday, March 7, 2026 at 8:00 AM

In person - Culinary Arts Institute, 164 Race Street, Holyoke, MA 01040

Attendance

Trustees Present: Trustee Yolanda Johnson, Trustee Nayroby Rosa, Trustee Ivonne Vidal, Trustee Patricia Samra, Trustee Aaron Vega, and Chair Vanessa Smith

Trustees Absent: Trustee Julius Dixon, Trustee Sonia Dinnall, Trustee Charlie Epstein

In-Person Guests: Dr. Marlowe Washington, President Dr. George Timmons, Angela Cardenas and Jennifer Kerr

MEETING

- I. Call to Order – Chair Smith called the Special Session of the Holyoke Community College Board of Trustees to order at 8:49 a.m.
- II. Introduction and Trustee Skills Discussion
 - A. Chair Smith reviewed the agenda and outlined the goals for the day
 - B. Trustees took approximately five minutes each to share with the Board their answers to the following questions: (1) Why were you asked to serve on this Board? (2) What expertise and experiences (work, life, education, talents, skills) do you bring to the Board? (3) Are we using your unique skills; how could we do a better job? The purpose of this exercise was to highlight the many talents, skills, and experiences that Trustees bring to the table and to begin thinking as a group about how the Board as a whole might draw upon those talents, skills, and experiences in service to the College. The hope is that this will result in a more rewarding Trustee experience and a more active and engaged Board, including through more robust Board committee work, which will be discussed later in the meeting.
- III. Trustee Compact Discussion
 - A. Trustee Vidal (using a handout distributed to those in attendance) provided an overview of how Massachusetts law describes the duties of a community college Trustee; Trustee Vidal and Chair Smith elaborated on these statutory duties as well as the common law duties of care, obedience, and loyalty and what those look like in practice (e.g., coming to meetings prepared, being an active participant in Board discussions, putting the interests of the College before one’s own personal or business interests, and abiding by conflict of interest rules and processes).
 - B. Trustee Vidal and Chair Smith lead a discussion of the draft Trustee Compact, including provisions regarding in-person meeting attendance, service on at least one committee, and attendance at Commencement and at least two other College events during the academic year. After discussion, all Trustees present expressed agreement with the Compact, which will be brought to the Board for approval at the March meeting.
- IV. Board Committees Discussion

Chair Smith reminded those in attendance that one of the take-aways from the Board’s 2025 summer retreat was a commitment to revisit the Board committee structure. The purpose of this final session of the special meeting was to review what committees are currently doing, what work the Board wants

to accomplish through its committees, and whether the current committee structure should be changed.

Each committee chair gave an overview of the work performed by the committee, its meeting frequency, and its composition. Highlights of this discussion included:

- The general sense is that the Audit and Finance Committee is working well and is accomplishing appropriate work (i.e., review and approval of the budget, review and approval of the external audit, oversight of the College's investments, review of major financial decisions, and general oversight of facilities issues). It was requested that the committee consider how it might better digest, condense, and present to the full Board in summary form financial information of which Trustees should be aware and that the committee work with administration to provide appropriate education to the full Board regarding College finances.
- The Governance Committee is working well and is accomplishing appropriate work (e.g., preparation of Trustee Compact and committee charters, review and revision of the bylaws, and planning and conducting periodic retreats, among other things). The committee has proposed incorporating the functions of the Presidential Evaluation and Nominating Committees under its purview.
- The Equity Committee, which began in 2020 in response to the murder of George Floyd and other national events, was the driving force behind the preparation of the Board's Anti-Racism Statement and the planning and implementation of a series of educational trainings over the past several years for Trustees and administration on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The importance of this work was stressed, along with a recognition that the work of this committee is evolving. Discussion ensued regarding the work of the committee and whether our goals, including regarding achievement by all students and closing achievement gaps, would be best met through a stand-alone equity committee or whether it would make more sense to embed principles of equity into the work of all committees. The consensus was to do the latter while remaining explicit about our commitment to equity.
- The Strategic Planning Committee began in around 2018 in connection with the development of the College's first strategic plan. The committee has been involved in monitoring progress on the metrics related to the existing strategic plan and in the development of Strategic Plan 3.0. Discussion included questions about the appropriate role of the committee during the plan implementation period, an observation that as currently operated the committee's work is not distinguishable from that of the full board, and a suggestion that the committee be reconfigured to oversee and monitor the implementation of Strategic Plan 3.0, including with an enhanced focus on student experience, academic quality, and employee experience. The decision was made to further explore such a reconfiguration, tied to the finalization of Strategic Plan 3.0, in connection with the Board's retreat in summer 2026.
- The Advocacy Committee is currently inactive. Discussion ensued regarding the need for a standing committee for advocacy, versus an ad hoc committee organized for advocacy around a particular issue or informal collaboration between the President and individual Trustees regarding advocacy as needs arise. The general sentiment was in favor of abolishing the Advocacy Committee in favor of other vehicles for more efficient advocacy work.

V. Wrap Up

Take-aways included:

- A. Agreement as indicated above concerning the Trustee Compact, to be presented for approval at the March Board of Trustees meeting.
- B. General agreement concerning the direction of the Committees, as outlined above.

- C. A suggestion was made that a calendar be put together and presented at the August meeting each year that includes all Board and committee meetings, as well as significant College events, to facilitate individual planning and thereby boost attendance and participation.
- D. The Governance Committee will work with the President's Office to plan an agenda for the Board's summer retreat.

VI. Adjournment – 12:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Angela O. Cardenas
Board Professional, Board of Trustees

Approved: Vanessa L. Smith
Chair, Board of Trustees

Approved: Ivonne Vidal
Secretary, Vice Chair, Board of Trustees