Wake County Smart Start
Board of Directors Meeting
June 25, 2025

A meeting of the Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) Board of Directors was held on Wednesday, June 25, 2025, with Chair Katherine Williams presiding.

Board Members present: André Anthony, Nikia Coates, Veronica Creech, Matthew Ellinwood, Susan Evans, Ariel Ford, Sherry Heuser, Mickey Holt, Nikki Leonard, Ronetta Pearsall, Stephanie Shell, Joe White, Katherine Williams.

Board Members absent: Matthew Glova, Antonia Pedroza, Tonya Venable.

Staff Members present: Gayle E. Headen, Gary Carr, Joan Crutchfield, Rob Linens, Alex Livas-Dlott, Bryce McClamroch, Jen McPherson, Carol Orji, Alex Setzer, Taylor Young

Guests Present: Roberta Hill

Call to Order/Announcements

At 9:02 AM, Chair Katherine Williams recognized a quorum and called the meeting to order. She called attention to the presence of staff members and guests.

Ms. Williams requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Sherry Heuser moved to adopt the agenda. Susan Evans seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (6-25-66)

NC Pre-K Mission Moment

Ms. Williams introduced WCSS Data Manager Alex Setzer to present the Mission Moment. Mr. Setzer's presentation shared demographics of Wake County, birth rates, and population shifts and noted that the data collected will assist WCSS in observing shifts and trends over time. Mr. Seter shared that 48 parents received an assessment in the HIPPY program, with 96% of the parents showing growth in parenting quality. The PAT program had 37 parents who received an assessment with a 76% showing growth in parenting quality. He shared that WCSS had 18 early childhood funded partners; 300 families participated in parent support groups or classes; 316 families received services at home to promote developmental growth and wellbeing of children; and 284 children received case management services. Further, more than 17,000 Pre-K applications had been submitted since January 2022. WCSS staff is analyzing current data, and analysis will continue as they work on an interactive data dashboard using Power BI.

Consent Agenda

Ms. Williams requested a motion to adopt the consent agenda, including the Minutes of the April 23, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting, 2024-25 Financial Reports, Wake ThreeSchool Budget and Decommissioning of Assets. Veronica Creech moved to adopt the consent agenda including the Minutes of the April 23, 2025, Board of Directors Meeting, 2024-25 Financial Reports, Wake ThreeSchool Budget and Decommissioning of Assets. Ronetta Pearsall seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (6-25-67)

Committee Reports

Advancement Committee

Nikia Coates presented the Advancement Committee report. Ms. Coates shared that that WCSS had raised $49,708 for FY 2024-25, compared to $17,681 for FY 2023-24, an 181% increase. She thanked Rob Linens and WCSS staff for their fundraising efforts. She issued a call to action to Board members to make their FY2024-25 gifts, as 100% Board giving can be crucial to receiving certain grants. Ms. Coates also asked Board Members to complete the Board Participation Survey by June 30th and invited them to attend the Take Care Documentary screening sponsored by WCSS and Early Years at the Wake Commons Building at 4:00 PM on June 25th.

Allocation Committee

In Tonya Venable's absence, Executive Director Gayle Headen presented the Allocation Committee recommendation. In April, the Allocation Committee brought the Board a recommendation to issue an RFA for a Raising a Reader program. Five potential vendors responded, and four were recommended to receive total funding of $125,000. The recommended vendors for funding are:

VENDOR	ALLOCATION
East Wake Education Foundation	$7,980
Fiesta Cristiana Mission Congregation	$45,418
Step Up Ministry	$20,000
Wake County Smart Start	$51,602

Ms. Williams asked for a second for the Committee recommendation. Veronica Creech seconded the Committee recommendation for approval of up to $125,000 in funding for four organizations to implement four Raising a Reader activities in FY25-27. For this targeted RFA opportunity, recommendations are based on community need, alignment with Board-identified priorities as reflected in the WCSS Strategic Framework and the availability of WCSS funding. With no opposition, the request from the Allocations Committee was approved. (6-25-68)

Board Governance Committee

Sherry Heuser reported for the Board Governance Committee. Four candidates were vetted and are recommended by the Committee for election, and four existing Board members were recommended for re-election, both for three-year terms beginning on July 1, 2025. Additionally, the Committee recommended the Board officers for election, terms to begin on July 1, 2025.

Ms. Williams asked for a second to the Committee recommendation. Susan Evans seconded the motion to approve the following as of July 1, 2025:

1.) The following candidates be elected to the WCSS Board to serve a 3-year term expiring in 2028:

- Kerry Adams
- Kelsey Camarena
- Jason Horton
- Michele Woodson

2.) The following WCSS Board members be re-elected to serve a 3-year term to expire in 2028:

- Matthew Ellinwood
- Mickey Holt
- Tonya Venable
- Katherine Williams

3.) The following officers to be elected:

- Nikia Coates as Board Chair
- Ariel Ford as Vice-Chair
- Matt Ellinwood as Secretary
- Matt Glova as Treasurer
- Katherine Williams as Past Chair

Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the Allocations Committee recommendation passed. (6-25-69)

Finance Committee

On behalf of Chair Matthew Glova, Joe White presented three recommendations for the Finance Committee. The first is for the FY2025-26 Administrative budget. He noted that the Administrative budget is similar to FY2024-25.

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Ms. Williams asked for a second to the Committee recommendation. André Anthony seconded the Finance Committee recommendation for approval of the FY 2026 Administration budget inclusive of Smart Start, NC PreK Administration, MAC Grant, MAC Services, Grants and Unrestricted Funds and the FY 2026 Fundraising Budget. Approval of the allocation of $49,837 from Smart Administration funds to support the Fundraising Budget and reservation of $34,326 in Smart Start Administration funds for future use in Smart Start Administration or In-House Activities. Hearing no opposition, the motion passed. (6-25-70)

The second recommendation Mr. White presented from the Committee regarded WCSS FY2024-25 carry forward funds and any funds that become unallocated during FY2025-26. The estimated reverted and carry forward funds from FY2024-25 is approximately $322,875. This recommendation is to meet the carry forward cap imposed by NCPC regulations to $310,483. Mr. White commended the Finance staff and WCSS staff. As a percentage of spending, keeping the carry forward figure low means almost every dollar available was used to impact Wake County families.

Ms. Williams asked for a second to the Committee recommendation. Ariel Ford seconded the Finance Committee recommendation authorizing staff to allocate Smart Start FY 2024-2025 carry forward funds and any funds that become unallocated during FY 2025-2026 to fund WCSS in-house activities and administration during FY 2025-2026. After discussion and with no opposition, the recommendation passed. (6-25-71)

The final Finance Committee recommendation presented by Mr. White was for a one-time contribution of $6,000 to be made to each eligible employee's account under the provisions of the 401k and Profit Sharing Plan to ensure WCSS meets the NCPC cap, as well as to acknowledge Agency staff. In the past, the contribution was $5,000. The Committee recommended an increase to $6,000 with a total cost of approximately $228,000 from unexpended budgets.

Hearing no questions, Ms. Williams called for a second to the Committee's recommendation. Veronica Creech seconded the Finance Committee's recommendation that a one-time employer contribution of $6,000 be made to each eligible employee's 401k account in accordance with the WCSS 401k Plan and Profit-Sharing Provision at the end of the current fiscal year. With unanimous approval, the motion passed. (6-25-72)

Chair's Report

Ms. Williams yielded her time to Ms. Headen.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Gayle Headen asked Ms. Coates if she would say a few words before Ms. Headen's report.

Ms. Coates noted that this is Ms. Williams' last meeting as Board Chair, but she will still be on the Board as Past Chair and will serve as Board Governance Committee Chair. Ms. Coates thanked Ms. Williams for her tremendous leadership over the past two years. She shared her own thoughts and memories, as well as some from other Board members and Agency Staff. Ms. Williams said she was honored to serve and praised prior leadership for making her job easier. She also praised the WCSSS staff and said she learned much during her tenure that she tries to implement herself.

Ms. Headen used her remaining time to ask Board members to review her written report, making note of the one-page Block Party summary at the end of her report. She thanked Alex Livas-Dlott for summarizing the Action Plan progress for FY2024-25. She said that Agency staff had done a phenomenal job and included funded partners in her praise. Ms. Headen also echoed Ms. Coates' and the Board's appreciation of Ms. Williams in her leadership capacity and is glad she remains as the Immediate Past Chair. She also acknowledged Board Member Sherry Heuser, who is retiring from the Board as of June 30th after ten years of service. Ms. Heuser continues with WCSS as a community member and through her board participation at the state level with NCPC. Ms. Headen also praised Ms. Heuser's last recommendation as Chair of the Board Governance Committee and thanked Ms. Williams and Ms. Heuser for everything they have done for the Board.

Ms. Williams encouraged Board members to read the Executive Director's highlights and shared her appreciation for all the hard work everyone on the Board has done and noted that the work done by Smart Start matters. She told the Board about her attendance at the Frankie Lemon graduation ceremony and the amazing environment

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they have created. Ms. Williams stated that Smart Start is making a huge impact on the future and what it means for all of us. She once again thanked Board members for their service.

With no further business to discuss, Sherry Heuser moved to adjourn the meeting. Andre Anthony seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned by Ms. Williams at 10:03 AM. (6-25-73)

Signed by:

Matt Ellinwood

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9/10/2025 | 12:33 PM EDT

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