

**Wake County Smart Start
Board of Directors Meeting
April 22, 2026**

A meeting of the Wake County Smart Start (WCSS) Board of Directors was held on Wednesday, April 22, 2026, with Chair Nikia Coates presiding.

Wake County Smart Start Board Members present: Nikia Coates, André Anthony, Matthew Ellinwood, Susan Evans, Ariel Ford, Matthew Glova, Jason Horton, Nikki Leonard, Kerry McCarthy Adams, Ronetta Pearsall, Antonia Pedroza, Stephanie Shell, Tonya Venable, Joe White, Katherine Williams, Michele Woodson.

Wake County Smart Start Board Members absent: Veronica Creech

Staff Members: Gary Carr, Joan Crutchfield, Sasha Gomez, Vanessa Guzman, Gayle E. Headen, Caroline Janes, Robert Linens, Alejandra Livas-Dlott, Bryce McClamroch, Carol Orji, Lynn Policastro, Taylor Young and Iman Lomax

Guests present: Teyana Hunt

Call to Order/Announcements

At 9:04 AM, Chair Nikia Coates recognized a quorum and called the meeting to order. She called attention to the presence of staff members and guests.

Ms. Coates requested a motion to adopt the agenda. Michele Woodson moved to adopt the agenda. Katherine Williams seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (4-22-14)

Mission Moment

Ms. Coates introduced Vanessa Guzman, Caroline Janes, and Sasha Gomez to present the Mission Moment. The SIPE team shared SIPE Family Navigation, the newest activity added to Smart Start as a formal activity that is delivered and implemented to give service to families in need. It provides direct support to families through Family Navigation.

Consent Agenda

Ms. Coates requested a motion to adopt the consent agenda. Michele Woodson moved to adopt the consent agenda, including the Minutes of February 25, 2026, Board of Directors Meeting, and March 26 Financial Reports. Ronetta Pearsall seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and with none opposed, the motion carried. (4-22-15)

Committee Reports: Advancement Committee

Advancement Committee Chair, Veronica Creech, was absent on the call; Rob Linens gave the report. Rob briefly shared the outcome of the Early Advantage Event held on Thursday, April 16th, 2026. He then shared the progress on the 30th Anniversary event, which has raised \$51,500 in pledges to date. The first Host Committee meeting was also held, the same week as the Early Advantage event.

Allocations Committee

Nikki Leonard discussed recommendations for up to \$12,795,432 in funding for 12 different organizations to implement 23 activities for the 26–27 year. For the 3-year funding cycle, recommendations are based on needs within the community, alignment with Board-identified priorities as reflected in the WCSS Strategic Framework, and the availability of WCSS funding.

FY 26 – 27 Funding Recommendation requires a vote; abstentions noted: Susan Evans, Jason Horton, Ronetta Pearsall, Antonio Pedroza, Stephanie Schell, Tonya Venable and Michelle Woodson. Kerry McCarthy Adams seconded the motion, and with no objections, the motion passed. (4-22-16)

Finance Committee

Finance Committee Chair Matthew Glova reported that the Committee is actively managing financial responsibilities and overall financial oversight. The focus of the committee is now on endowment development and training. 2 out of 4 training sessions have been completed. The remaining training sessions will be completed before the end of the fiscal year. The committee has a goal to launch the organization's endowment soon, as a critical and long-term impact is expected over the next 10-20 years.

Chair's Report

Ms. Coates reported that the organization continues to work with Jeong Collective on its strategic planning process, which has been thoughtful and well-paced. Insights from the community needs assessment, along with staff and partner surveys, are significantly informing discussions. Recent meetings have focused on clarifying how to deepen impact, including prioritizing children with the greatest needs while maintaining a broader vision for all children, and strengthening the organization's role as a systems leader. The process has emphasized careful deliberation, including examining trade-offs and avoiding rushed decisions. The team is now transitioning from "sense-making" to defining strategic direction and key priorities, with ongoing opportunities for board members to provide input or ask questions.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Gayle E. Headen emphasized the strong alignment across board efforts, noting how the community needs assessment, board engagement, and strategic planning to be interconnected to guide the development of a new strategic plan expected by August. Key themes from community feedback highlighted the families' needs around basic resources and access to services, reinforcing the importance of initiatives like family navigation. NCPC is launching into what is being called network modernization. There

are 4 components that NCPC has established for local partnerships to think about, which are regionalization, centralization, consolidation, and mergers. Wake County Smart Start is proactively focusing on diversification through developing an endowment to strengthen sustainability, expand resources, and better meet the growing needs of the community. Mrs. Headen also reminded the Board that the Block Party will take place on May 16th, 10 am to 2 pm.

With no further business to discuss, Ms. Coates asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Matthew Glova moved to adjourn the meeting. Nikki Leonard seconded the motion. Calling for a vote and hearing no objections, the meeting was adjourned by Ms. Coates at 10:09 AM. (4-22-17)

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