

MINUTES
POLK STATE COLLEGE
District Board of Trustees Retreat
Tuesday, October 14, 2025 – 8:30 a.m.
Polk State Advanced Technology Center – ATC 1106

Dr. Angela M. Garcia Falconetti called the October 14, 2025, District Board of Trustees Retreat to order at approximately 8:40 a.m.

Members Present: Ms. Ann Barnhart, Ms. Ashley Bell Barnett, Mr. Steve Lester, Mr. Greg Littleton, Ms. Teresa Martinez, Ms. Cindy Hartley Ross, and Mr. Ashley Troutman

Others in Attendance: Retreat Facilitator Dr. Keith Miller, President Angela Garcia Falconetti and Attorney David Carmichael, representing the absent Board Attorney Don Wilson

Welcome & Introductions:

The Board Retreat was facilitated by Dr. Keith Miller, Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT) consultant. Dr. Miller welcomed the group and provided a brief summary of his professional background and distributed his bio for the Board's information.

Overview & Objectives of the Retreat

Dr. Miller opened the retreat by emphasizing the competing priorities of Board members and how their actions set the tone for how the community views Polk State.

Board Roles & Responsibilities

- **Act as Unit: Collective Responsibility & Decision-Making**
 - Authority of the Board is vested within the body as a whole.
 - Respect differing opinions but strive for consensus.
 - Individual Board members have no authority to direct College staff. This is fiscally irresponsible.
 - Disagreement is okay, but support the final decision. Do not go out into the community and counter the decision.
 - Respect and consideration for others and for the responsibilities of trusteeship are crucial.
 - Board members do not do the work of their institutions; they establish standards for that work through policies they set.
 - Allegiance to the College, not a political party or special interest group.
 - Decisions should be based upon what has the most positive impact on students.
- **Represent all interests and needs of the College's legally defined service area**
 - Seek diverse representation on the Board. This includes diversity in professional background and thought.
 - Discussion was had regarding recommendations for empty Board seats and best practices for gubernatorial appointments. Dr. Miller noted that the structure differs vastly from state to state.

- Understand the diversity of the communities and their education and workforce needs. Support local economic development councils.
- Prioritize the College's mission over partisan interests when making decisions. Can't take a request from one individual unless it is in the best interest of the College and its students.
- **Employ Policy Governance**
 - Policy vs. Procedure: Differentiate between broad policies and administrative policies. It is crucial that a Board has a policy-making process, and tests the implementation process to ensure it is being implemented as intended. Seek feedback from first line staff to inform you of what works and what doesn't.
 - **Board's Role:**
 - ✓ Focus on the "big picture" not day-to-day management.
 - If an employee approaches you regarding a concern, thank them for sharing, and take it to the President. Don't take it and run with it.
 - ✓ Focus on strategic planning and leadership
 - ✓ Publicly support the CEO
 - ✓ Hold the CEO accountable
 - ✓ Set a tone of respect and civility
 - Come together as a Board in final decision
 - ✓ Respect written policy as the voice of the Board
 - ✓ Exercise fiduciary responsibility
 - This is not just financial
 - ✓ Monitor policy implementation
 - Is the policy working
 - Should it be tweaked
 - Should it be removed
 - What is the impact of the policy
 - ✓ Discussion was had regarding a "Code of Conduct" for the Board. President Garcia Falconetti confirmed that the Board does not have one. Dr. Miller distributed a Code of Conduct from Alamo Community College in Texas for the Board's reference and described it as a good model.
 - ✓ Dr. Miller distributed a document adapted from the ACCT's *Trusteeship in Community Colleges*, Second Edition titled "Board Meeting Do's and Don'ts"
 - **Do's:**
 - ❖ participate in thoughtful discussion;
 - ❖ be concise with thoughts and discussion;
 - ❖ respectful body and facial expressions;
 - ❖ aware that board meetings are a forum for board business and should proceed according to the agenda;
 - ❖ allow public discussion at the end of the board agenda and have a process for moderating comments;

- ❖ remember that the board has one employee, the CEO, and only the CEO can delegate to staff;
- ❖ understand and adhere to parliamentary procedures;
- ❖ be aware that board meetings are public

➤ **Don'ts:**

- ❖ discuss items not on the agenda, and have a process for designing future agendas if something comes up;
 - ❖ overly dwell on a point, move on;
 - ❖ display uncivil body language;
 - ❖ engage in one-on-one discussions with audience members – pay attention;
 - ❖ get caught with a policy that provides limits and creates structure for public comment;
 - ❖ direct staff to do something, all requests go through the CEO;
 - ❖ be inconsistent using parliamentary procedures;
 - ❖ reveal information shared in executive sessions
- The question was asked about closed sessions under the Sunshine Law. Attorney Carmichael stated that the doors of the Sunshine can be closed for an executive session for some scenarios such as litigation against the College and some personnel related matters.

▪ **President's Role:**

- ✓ Provides the Board with information and recommendations for policy development
 - This helps create a policy making process
- ✓ Oversee implementation and evaluation of policies
 - Discussion was had regarding the frequency of evaluating policies (known as Rules at Polk State). Polk State's current accrediting body, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) requires "regular" review of policies.
 - Additional discussion was had regarding the State's requirement to change accrediting bodies (after Polk State completes its 5th Year Interim Report). This change will require permission to switch accrediting bodies from the USDOE.
- ✓ Do not ask the Board to make decisions without advance preparation
 - Provide the Board with timely, comprehensive, relevant information to inform decisions.
- ✓ Respect the time of the Board

• **Select and hold the CEO accountable**

- Board and CEO as a team – create a strong, supportive, and collaborative relationship.
 - Dr. Miller stated that you can feel if/when an organization has strong leadership and cohesion

- How effective can the College be if there is internal fighting
 - There must be trust
 - A Board member discussing things outside of the Board meeting, kills the ability for the Board to discuss as a body in the future
 - Board can be supportive by being the eyes and ears of the community
 - An environment of success – empower the CEO with necessary authority and resources to implement the College’s Mission and Vision.
 - The Mission and Vision are the “marching orders”
 - Define expectations for the CEO through policies & annual goals
 - Discussion was had regarding how to bring up a concern during a Board meeting. Attorney Carmichael stated that if a Board member wants to make a statement, it is still best to put it on the agenda in case it potentially requires a vote. There should be no surprises during the Board meeting.
 - Regularly monitor the CEO and provide feedback on established expectations and goals.
 - Dr. Miller stated that the worst thing about annual performance reviews are that they are annual; don’t hold comments to the end of the evaluation period
 - Discussion was had pertaining to bringing up a concern about the CEO/President. Dr. Miller stated that it is best to bring it directly the CEO/President as a professional courtesy. The CEO/President should then let the Board Chair know and then it can be added to the Board meeting agenda for full Board discussion. If there is consensus during the Board meeting that the same concern is not shared, support the Board decision.
 - This process will prevent being in violation of the Sunshine Law by not discussing with another Board member outside of a public meeting.
 - Some brief discussion was had regarding the current evaluation instrument used for the President. It was noted that the current metric aligns with the standards outlined in the President’s contract.
 - Foundational Components
 - Good communication, transparency, aligning on vision, strategy, and goals are essential for a strong Board-CEO relationship.
- **Set the College’s Strategic Direction**
 - “Boards set the tone for the entire system, district, or institution through their behavior and policies. Successful boards establish a climate in which learning is valued, professional growth is enhanced, and the most important goals are student success and adding value to the community.” *Trusteeship in Community Colleges, ACCT*
 - Set the College’s Strategic Direction
 - Mission, Vision, Values are the foundation
 - Engage stakeholders
 - Monitor & evaluate
 - The Planning Process
 - Environmental Scan – internal and external factors impacting the College.

- ✓ President Garcia Falconetti reminded the group about the Emsi/Burning Glass economic study that was conducted for fiscal year (FY) 2020-21.
 - ✓ She noted that the Florida College System is also commissioning an economic study.
 - ✓ Strategic Plan is informed by the Environmental Scan.
 - Define strategic goals and objectives
 - Strategy Development – How will you make it happen.
 - Monitor and Evaluate – track progress and make adjustments.
 - ✓ Support CEO/President to reach strategic objectives and goals
 - ✓ Key Performance Indicators – how to set annual goals and how to know when the College is effective. Dr. Miller distributed a sample structure for reporting performance standards for the group's review.
 - Tracking student success – the Board should receive reports throughout the year – are we doing what we need to be doing?
 - However, performance indicators are not measurable month to month, best to provide a comprehensive report showing trends. Details on why objectives fell short and addressing challenges.
 - Strategic Plan is dynamic
 - Dr. Miller distributed a sample timeline for developing a Strategic Plan for the group's review and information.
 - ✓ President Garcia Falconetti will bring the current schedule of rule review to Chair Barnhart and then to the Board.
 - Discussion ensued about employee satisfaction surveys and how to measure morale. President Garcia Falconetti shared that it has been approximately four years since the last external employee satisfaction survey was conducted, but the goal is to launch an external survey in the spring. Dr. Miller suggested conducting surveys every other year to address gaps and to stick with a schedule.
 - Discussion was had about the Board's Self-Evaluation instrument. Dr. Miller emphasized that the instrument is a standard of good practice. Provides an opportunity to assess characteristics of effective governance. Can help to set standards, clarify expectations, and serves as an example of the Board's ongoing commitment to accountability and assessment for the College community.
- **Fiscal Health & Stability**
 - Financial Oversight – ensuring the adequacy of financial management and controls
 - Resource Allocation
 - Risk Management
 - Financial Literacy
 - Fiduciary Duties:
 - Duty of Care – engagement, attendance, informed, strategic, monitor

- Duty of Loyalty – operate in the interest of the college, and entire community – not a special interest
- Duty of Obedience – follow state and federal laws, system and college policies, act within the scope of these documents
- **Culture of Innovation & Accountability**
 - Transparency
 - Strive for Excellence, Integrity
 - Continuous Learning
 - Track Performance Utilizing Technology & Data
 - President Garcia Falconetti reminded the group about the data dashboard being developed
 - Lead by example by exhibiting forward-thinking
 - Foster a culture of open communication where all members feel empowered to voice concerns and ideas; have discussions
- **Advocation for the College**
 - Facilitate community partnerships
 - Attend College events
 - Support the College's Foundation
- **Effective Governance Practices**
 - Building a Team
 - Board Chair role
 - ✓ Conduct board meetings
 - ✓ Maintaining decorum
 - ✓ Serve as spokesperson
 - President's role
 - ✓ Provide information
 - ✓ Provide continuous learning
 - Trusted Partners
 - Future-Orientated Policies
 - Input from stakeholders
 - Conflict of interest policy
 - Policy alignment – always a good goal
 - Board Professional Development
 - Retreats, workshops
 - Attend state and national conferences
 - Self-assessments
 - Board development plan
 - Professional development can be as small as reading an article

Case Study – Conflict of Interest

Dr. Miller distributed a case study focusing on conflict of interest for the Board's review and input.

- The case study indicated that during a board meeting, a board member and local developer advocated for hiring his own construction company to manage a major expansion project

on campus. While he recuses himself from the final vote, his vocal and persistent advocacy has pressured other board members. The contract is awarded to his firm, and a local newspaper reports on his strong influence during the decision-making process and the college's lack of a clear conflict-of-interest policy. Some faculty and students voice concerns about the appearance of impropriety, suggesting it eroded trust in the board's integrity.

- It was not known if a Request for Proposals (RFP) process was utilized in the case study. If it was appropriate to recuse himself from the vote, it was appropriate for him to recuse himself from the entire process.
- Dr. Miller asked what other actions the board should have taken to prevent this situation in the first place. Discussion was had regarding a "point of order" and Robert's Rules of Order.
- Additional discussion occurred regarding Polk State's current Code of Ethics (Rule 1.06), which Dr. Miller described as being a little weak.
 - Dr. Miller recommended that a Code of Ethics should not be too generic and that every board member should sign the Code of Ethics. Dr. Miller distributed a sample Board of Trustees Code of Ethics for the group's information.
 - Discussion was had regarding policies aligning with state and federal laws. Attorney Carmichael emphasized that the policy shouldn't conflict with law and that law will supersede the policy. Policy should complement law.

Case Study – Advisory vs. Operations

Dr. Miller distributed a case study focusing on Advisory Role vs. Operations for the Board's review and input.

- The case study highlighted a concern of a new board chair that the majority of members do not understand the basic difference between the board's policy role and the administration of the college. This concern has been intensified with the hiring of a new president. Influential board members have begun to tell her how to solve internal problems and run certain programs. The chair believes they are only trying to be helpful but is worried that the board will begin to try to run the college.
- No ill intent on part of anyone but the outcome can be the same.
- This can negatively impact how the community perceives the college.
- Conversation deviated from the case study to discuss current media issues. It was emphasized that the Chair is the spokesperson for the media. It is appropriate if approached by media to simply state that the matter is being reviewed rather than stating no comment.
- Discussion was had about financial reporting's placement on the consent agenda. Should it be pulled out of consent and placed on regular board agenda? Is there a detailed enough reporting on financials? President Garcia Falconetti noted that the College is audited by the state and perhaps a representative from the Auditor General's office could come to a meeting to discuss the process. Dr. Miller stated that the auditor could present on "how to tighten up."

ACCT Resources:

Dr. Miller distributed an overview of ACCT Services including the below.

- ACCT Connect: online learning platform (<https://connect.org/about>). It has a number of governance modules, a policy library, and other resources.
- Events:
 - ACCT Annual Leadership Congress (October 2025)
 - ACCT National Legislative Summit (February 2026)
 - Governance Leadership Institutes (Spring & Summer)
- ACCT Trustee Quarterly
- ACCT Publications: He highlighted ACCT's flagship publication, *Trusteeship in Community Colleges: A Guide for Effective Practice*. It is available for purchase from the ACCT library.
- In the Know with ACCT – A Podcast

Concluding Remarks:

Dr. Miller requested each participant in today's retreat to provide some closing comments. Ms. Bell Barnett and Mr. Littleton departed the meeting prior to concluding remarks.

Mr. Troutman

- How do we establish trust
- Can we review policy making policy
- Increase frequency of employee satisfaction surveys
- Increase urgency of Presidential evaluation metrics

Ms. Martinez

- Thanked Dr. Miller for putting us on the right path

Mr. Lester

- Most important document shared today: Board Meetings Do's & Don'ts
- Our job is not to run Polk State, that is President Falconetti's job; don't get into the weeds of operations
- Just because a statute allows something, doesn't mean we do it
- Board can control the media

Ms. Ross

- Recommended participating in podcasts by Dr. Pamela Fisher, ACCT consultant
- Emphasized that we used to review policies (rules) regularly – need to get back to that
- Strategic Plan goals and metrics – requested regular reports so the Board members can give input on what they believe is most critical

Ms. Barnhart

- Referred back to when she first joined the board, noting that a lot of reports were given, but there was not much discussion
- Regular review of policies (rules), a rolling review of rules is needed, some of the current rules are too comprehensive
- Committed as Chair to bring to fruition the rebuilding of trust

Dr. Miller

- Requested each participant to complete the 2025 Board Retreat evaluation form included in their packets. Chair Barnhart requested Board members to return completed forms to Ms. Christine Lee, who will then forward to the ACCT.

Adjournment:

The retreat adjourned at approximately 2:20 p.m.



Ms. Ann Barnhart
DBOT Chair



Date



Dr. Angela M. Garcia Falconetti
President



Date