ARKANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD
Regular Quarterly Meeting
January 23, 2026

Minutes of Meeting

The January 23, 2026, regular meeting of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) was held at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Chair Jim Carr called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., with a quorum present.

Coordinating Board present:	Coordinating Board absent:
Dr. Jim Carr, Chair	Dr. Jerry Cash
Lucas Pointer, Vice Chair	Heather Maxey
Dr. Katherine Dudley, Secretary	Carolyn Rhinehart
Graycen Bigger	

Presidents, chancellors, institutional representatives, members of the press, ADHE staff and guests were also present.

Agenda Item No. 1
Welcome

Chair Carr began by calling on Chancellor Christina Drale for a welcome. Dr. Drale welcomed Coordinating Board members, ADHE staff, and presidents and chancellors to the UALR campus, highlighting the institution's numerous facility upgrades and announcing the February launch of the Cyberspace Operations, Research, and Education (CORE) Center.

Next, Chair Carr introduced Arkansas' Secretary of Education Jacob Oliva and ADE's Press Secretary Kaelin Clay.

Agenda Item No. 2
Approval of Minutes

Graycen Bigger moved to approve Agenda Item No. 2. Lucas Pointer seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 3
Report of Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee (Lucas Pointer, Dr. Katherine Dudley and Carolyn Rhinehart) recommended the following slate of Board officers for 2026-2027.

Chair – Dr. Jim Carr
Vice Chair – Lucas Pointer
Secretary/Treasurer – Dr. Katherine Dudley

Graycen Bigger moved to accept the 2026-2027 nominations. Dr. Katherine Dudley seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 4
Reimbursement of Expenses for
Members of the AHECB and ICAC

Although members of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board and its Institutional Certification Advisory Committee (ICAC) by law serve without compensation, they may receive expense reimbursement for performing official board duties after following certain procedures set out by Act 1211 of 1995 (A.C.A. §25-16-901 et seq.).

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board, by a majority vote of its total membership, authorizes expense reimbursement for each board member and member of the ICAC for performing official board duties.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the expense reimbursement shall not exceed the rate established for state employees by state travel regulations.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Director of the Division of Higher Education to send a copy of this resolution to the Department of Finance and Administration to notify that agency of compliance with Act 1211 of 1995.

Lucas Pointer moved to approve Agenda Item No. 4. Dr. Katherine Dudleyseconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 5
Commissioner's Report

Institutional Changes

Dr. Ricky Tompkins has been named the next chancellor of the University of Arkansas Hope-Texarkana (UAHT), beginning on February 1.

Tompkins currently serves as vice president for technical education and workforce development at North Arkansas College. He has worked with multiple institutions and has brought decades of experience in higher education leadership across Arkansas.

Staff Changes
Jason Kunau joined ADHE as our new Finance Controller. He began on January 20th. Jason previously served as the CFO for Arkansas PBS.

Tony Williams Update
Tony Williams, Director of the Arkansas Student Loan Authority (ASLA), provided an update on student loan programs, including recent developments, borrower trends, and ongoing efforts to support student access and affordability across the state.

Agenda Item No. 6
University of Arkansas System Update

The University of Arkansas System President Jay Silveria presented an update on the UA System. President Silveria began by thanking the AHECB and Secretary Oliva for all they do for education in Arkansas. He then explained that the UA System manages a total systemwide budget of more than $4.2 billion and employs nearly 27,000 Arkansans. Its benefits plan covers more than 35,000 individuals, and the system enrolls nearly 70,000 students. Over the past five years, its institutions have awarded more than 100,000 degrees and certificates, helping to ensure better futures for Arkansans and their communities.

Agenda Item No. 7
Annual Report on Institutional Certification

Alana Colburn presented an update on the number of Arkansas residents pursuing academic degrees offered by out-of-state or private institutions certified to operate in Arkansas under Arkansas Code Annotated §6-61-301.

Boles reported that in 2024-25, 8 Arkansas campuses, 36 institutions with programs delivered only through distance technology, 5 institutions offering programs both on Arkansas campuses and through distance technology and 3 institutions offering programs only on an Arkansas campus, were certified under ICAC rules.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 8
Report on Academic Program Viability

Mason Campbell presented a summary report on academic programs reviewed by the institutions for program viability purposes. ADHE staff annually identify existing certificate and degree programs that do not meet AHECB program viability standards. New certificates and associate degrees will be identified for program viability standards after three years, and bachelor's degrees and above will be identified after five years.

Graycen Bigger thanked ADHE staff for their work on the program, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a strong focus on students and ensuring programs provide clear, viable pathways.

Agenda Item No. 9
Annual Enrollment Report

Sonia Hazelwood reported that the total unduplicated headcount for the fall 2025 term in all sectors of Arkansas higher education, including public 4-year universities, public 2-

year colleges, private and independent colleges and universities, two nursing schools, and one technical institute was 160,453 students.

Arkansas higher education reported its highest ever fall term headcount in fall 2011 of 173,887 unduplicated students, likely in response to the recession of 2008. After that, headcount started a ten-year downward trend where the last two years of that ten-year period were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Headcount fell to 145,683 in fall 2021, which is comparable to headcount reported in fall terms of 2007 and 2008. The fall 2025 statewide headcount of 160,453, finally surpassed the pre-pandemic fall 2019 headcount of 156,064.

Chair Carr inquired whether Arkansas is experiencing the enrollment cliff, and Sonia Hazelwood indicated that the state has not yet seen its impact.

Agenda Item No. 10
Report on College-Going Rate

Sonia Hazelwood reported that of the 35,057 public high school students graduating from an Arkansas public high school in 2025, 14,762 enrolled at an Arkansas public or private/independent institution in fall 2025 immediately following their high school graduation. This represents a College-Going Rate of 42.1%, which is consistent with the 42% reported since the fall 2021 term.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 11
Annual Higher Education Financial Condition Report

Nick Fuller presented the Annual Higher Education Financial Condition Report. The purpose of this report is to describe the financial condition as well as the difficulties and challenges experienced by Arkansas's Public Institutions of Higher Education. It is recommended that ADHE continue to work with institutions to monitor and refine the Productivity Funding Model policies to ensure adequate funding is available to meet student needs, innovation is encouraged, and that the policies continue to respond to attainment goals and priorities of the state. AHECB, ADHE and institutions of higher education work with the legislature toward alignment of institutional funding policies, state financial aid policies, and tuition policies in a way that prioritizes higher education affordability.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 12
Maintenance Report

The AHECB policy for maintenance of new facilities passed October 29, 2010, states that a report on the amount transferred to plant funds would be presented annually at the October Board meeting. This policy was proposed to ensure that in the future, all newly constructed or purchased facilities will have a source of funding for maintenance of the new facility. Institutions seeking approval of a loan or a bond issue for the

construction or purchase of a new facility must provide for the maintenance of that facility by transferring annually to plant funds an amount as recommended by the Association of Physical Plant Administrators of Universities and Colleges (APPA). This is currently $2.50 per gross square foot for an educational and general facility or $1.25 per gross square foot for an auxiliary facility. A lower rate per gross square foot for a specific building/facility can be approved with appropriate justification.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 13
Recommendations or Educational and General Operations
State-Supported Institutions of Higher Education

A.C.A. §6-61-234 (Act 148 of 2017) directs the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board (AHECB) to adopt polices developed by the Arkansas Division of Higher Education (ADHE) necessary to implement a productivity-based funding model for state-supported institutions of higher education.

For the universities, a net 2.00% change in funding is recommended for a total change in university funding of $8,801,648.

For the two-year colleges, a net 2.000% change in funding is recommended for a total change in two-year college funding of $2,933,138.

For the non-formula entities, the recommendation is for a 3.4% increase based on the HEPI index and a recommendation of full funding of Operations and Program Enhancement requests which combined would require an additional $28.08 million, of which $3.4 million would be for the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS).

There were no questions.

Dr. Katherine Dudley moved to approve Agenda Item No. 13. Lucas Pointer seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 14
Personal Services Recommendations

A.C.A. §6-61-209 requires the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board to present a consolidated budget request from the state-supported colleges and universities to the General Assembly and the Governor prior to each regular session of the General Assembly. As part of this process, the quantity of positions, titles, and line-item maximum salaries for all non-classified administrative, academic, and auxiliary positions at each Arkansas public institution of higher education have been reviewed, and changes are recommended.

Institutions of higher education, apart from UAMS, have 27,144 positions currently authorized. For the 2026-27 Fiscal Year, institutions requested an increase of 49 positions and the deletion of 32 positions, for a net new request of 17 positions. ADHE staff recommends this net increase of 17 positions, for a total recommendation of 27,161 positions (a 0.1 percent increase). UAMS currently has 12,874 authorized positions and did not request any changes. ADHE staff recommends the current level of 12,874 positions.

> **RESOLVED,** That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts the recommended number of positions, titles, and maximum salaries for non-classified positions in academic, administrative, and auxiliary positions for the 2026-27 fiscal year as recommended by staff.
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> **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to make technical corrections consistent with Coordinating Board action.
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> **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the Coordinating Board requests the Commissioner to transmit the Personal Services recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly for consideration for the 2026-27 fiscal year.

There were no questions.

Graycen Bigger moved to approve Agenda Item No. 14. Dr. Katherine Dudley seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 15
Economic Feasibility of Debt Issue
Southern Arkansas University

Southern Arkansas University Magnolia (SAUM) requests approval of the economic feasibility of plans to secure auxiliary refunding bonds not to exceed $23.775 million with a term of thirty (30) years at an estimated annual interest rate of 4.85 percent. Proceeds from the bond issue will be used for auxiliary purposes. The Southern Arkansas University Board of Trustees approved this financing at its meeting on October 8, 2025.

The auxiliary bond issue will be approximately $23.775 million with an annual debt service of $5,389,981 and a term of thirty (30) years. Proceeds will be used to refund the 2015, 2016 and the 2018A series bonds, with no new funds issued. These bonds were secured through a privatized housing agreement with SAUM's Alumni Association. The existing obligation and the related assets will be transferred to the University.

> **RESOLVED**, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board considers the economically feasible plans for Southern Arkansas University Magnolia (SAUM) to secure auxiliary refunding bonds in an amount not to

exceed $23.775 million with a term of thirty (30) years at an estimated annual interest rate of 4.85 percent. Proceeds will be used to refund the 2015, 2016 and the 2018A series bonds, with no new funds issued.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to notify the President and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Southern Arkansas University System and Southern Arkansas University Magnolia (SAUM) of the Coordinating Board's resolution.

There were no questions.

Lucas Pointer moved to approve Agenda Item No. 15. Dr. Katherine Dudley seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 16
Economic Feasibility of Loan Issue
Arkansas State University-Jonesboro

Arkansas State University-Jonesboro (ASUJ) requests approval of the economic feasibility of plans to secure a loan from the College Savings Bond Revolving Loan Fund (CSBRLF) not to exceed $2.5M with a term of ten (10) years with an annual interest rate not to exceed 0.2 percent. Proceeds from the loan will be used for educational and general purposes (E&G). The Board of Trustees of Arkansas State University-System approved this financing at its meeting on December 12, 2025.

The E&G CSBRLF loan issue will not exceed $2.5M with an estimated annual debt service of $251,094 and a term of ten (10) years. Proceeds from the loan will be used for the construction of an Equine Barn and a Bovine Barn, and for the replacement of the Dean B. Ellis Library Chiller at ASUJ. Coordinating Board policy regarding debt service for E&G projects provides that a maximum of 25 percent of net tuition and fee revenue may be pledged to E&G debt service.

RESOLVED, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board considers economically feasible plans for Arkansas State University-Jonesboro (ASUJ) to obtain a loan from the College Savings Bond Revolving Loan Fund (CSBRLF) not to exceed $2.5M million with a term of up to ten (10) years at an estimated annual interest rate of 0.2 percent to construct an Equine Barn and a Bovine Barn, and for the replacement of the Dean B. Ellis Library Chiller at ASUJ.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to notify the President and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Arkansas State University-System (ASU-SYS) and the Chancellor of Arkansas State University-Jonesboro (ASUJ) of the Coordinating Board's resolution.

There were no questions.

Dr. Katherine Dudley moved to approve Agenda Item No. 16. Lucas Pointer seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 17
Economic Feasibility of Bond Issue
Arkansas State University-Jonesboro

Arkansas State University-Jonesboro (ASU) requests approval of the economic feasibility of plans to issue bonds not to exceed $16 million with a term of fifteen (15) years at an estimated annual interest rate of 4.5 percent. Proceeds from the bond issue will be used for auxiliary purposes. The Arkansas State University System Board of Trustees approved this financing at its meeting on December 12, 2025.

The auxiliary issue will be up to $16 million with a total maximum annual debt service of $1,489,821 and a term of fifteen (15) years. Proceeds from the bond issue will be used to renovate Kays Hall.

> **RESOLVED,** That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board considers economically feasible plans for Arkansas State University-Jonesboro (ASUJ) to issue bonds not to exceed $16 million with a term of fifteen (15) years at an estimated annual interest rate of 4.5 percent to renovate Kays Hall.
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> **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to notify the President and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of Arkansas State University-System and the Chancellor of Arkansas State University-Jonesboro of the Coordinating Board's resolution.

There were no questions.

Dr. Katherine Dudley moved to approve Agenda Item No. 17. Lucas Pointer seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 18
Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture
Certificate of Proficiency in Precision Agriculture
Arkansas State University – Beebe

The administration of Arkansas State University Beebe (ASUB) and Board of Trustees of the Arkansas State University System request approval to offer the Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture and Certificate of Proficiency in Precision Agriculture, effective Spring 2026.

The proposed Precision Agriculture program consists of a 31-credit-hour Technical Certificate and a 9-credit-hour Certificate of Proficiency both designed to meet growing

industry needs in technology-driven farming and agri-technology. This program's curriculum integrates plant and soil science, geospatial technologies, and agricultural systems with specialized training in GPS-guided equipment, unmanned aerial vehicles, control systems, and livestock monitoring tools. This blend of coursework and application will prepare students for entry-level employment in precision agriculture operations or for continued study in related degree programs.

> **RESOLVED**, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the offering of the Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture (CIP 01.0000) and Certificate of Proficiency in Precision Agriculture (CIP 01.0000) at Arkansas State University Beebe, effective Spring 2026.
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> **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to inform the Chancellor of Arkansas State University Beebe and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Arkansas State University System of the approval.

Dr. Blake Perkins, Chief Academic Officer, presented additional background information.

Graycen Bigger noted the letters of support from area high schools and asked whether the program would be primarily geared toward concurrent credit. Dr. Perkins responded that the focus is not primarily on current students, but rather on the introductory course.

Bigger observed that the farming industry has changed since 2023 and asked whether ASU-Beebe has discussed the future of agriculture, including hiring needs and wage projections for 2026–27. Dr. Perkins acknowledged the uncertainty but noted that the institution has maintained ongoing contact with local partners and is working to integrate this information into their program planning.

Bigger recommended that ASUB clearly market this program to their students.

Lucas Pointer moved to approve Agenda Item No. 18. Dr. Katherine Dudley seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Item No. 19
Associate of Applied Science in Farm and Ranch Management
Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture
Certificate of Proficiency in Agriculture Drone Technology
University of Arkansas Community College Batesville

The administration of the University of Arkansas Community College Batesville (UACCB) and Board of Trustees of the University of Arkansas System request approval to offer the Associate of Applied Science in Farm and Ranch Management (CIP 01.0104), Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture (CIP 01.0000), and the Certificate of Proficiency in Agriculture Drone Technology (CIP 49.0109), effective Fall 2026.

The proposed Farm and Ranch Management program will provide students with stackable credentials that integrate applied learning with essential technical and business competencies, preparing graduates to successfully operate or support modern farm and ranch enterprises. The 60-credit-hour Associate of Applied Science in Farm and Ranch Management, a primarily hands-on program, will prepare students to manage crop or livestock production by integrating best practices of agriculture operation with practical tools to start or manage a small-scale farm business. The 30-credit-hour Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture will provide students with foundational knowledge in safety principles and practices, equipment operation, maintenance, and repair, resource management, efficiency, and sustainability. The 12-credit-hour Certificate of Proficiency in Agriculture Drone Technology offers essential training in agricultural drone operations and precision agriculture tools. Together, these credentials will prepare graduates for entry-level employment in precision agriculture, farm operations, and related fields, while supporting a skilled workforce capable of meeting the technological demands of modern agriculture.

> **RESOLVED**, That the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the offering of the Associate of Applied Science in Farm and Ranch Management (CIP 01.0104), Technical Certificate in Precision Agriculture (CIP 01.0000), and Certificate of Proficiency in Agriculture Drone Technology (CIP 49.0109) at the University of Arkansas Community College Batesville, effective Fall 2026.
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> **FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education to inform the Chancellor of the University of Arkansas Community College Batesville and Chair of the Board of Trustees of the University or Arkansas System of the approval.

Dr. Zach Perrine and Dr. Brian Shonk presented additional background information.

Dr. Katherine Dudley inquired about UACCB's strategy for recruiting students. Dr. Perinne responded that the college has already begun collaborating with local agriculture programs to identify students who may be interested in this program.

Graycen Bigger asked what portion of the poultry industry is involved in the program. Dr. Shonk explained that the farmland and poultry operations are connected.

Graycen Bigger moved to approve Agenda Item No. 19. Dr. Katherine Dudley seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Items No. 20 & 21
Arkansas Public Institutions
Letters of Notification and Letters of Intent

The Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education approved institutional requests for new programs not requiring Board action unless further review is requested by the Board. During this period, the Institutional Certification Advisory Committee received notice of requests from Arkansas public institutions to offer degree programs. The program notice lists appear in the Arkansas Public Institutions Letters of Notification on pages 20-1 through 20-24 and in the Arkansas public institutions Letters of Intent on pages 21-1 of the agenda book.

There were no questions.

Agenda Item No. 22
Out-of-State and Arkansas Private Institutions

RESOLVED, That pursuant to A.C.A. §6-61-301, the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board grants initial certification to the institutions listed on pages 1 - 2 to offer the specified degree programs to Arkansas residents for a period of three years through December 31, 2029.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education is authorized to notify the administration of said institutions that the certification of the degree programs requires the institution to notify the Arkansas Division of Higher Education whenever any of the following occurs: (1) major reorganization of the controlling body; (2) changes in the charter or incorporation documents of the institution; or (3) changes in the method of operation of the institution's programs in Arkansas.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Coordinating Board instructs the Commissioner to notify the administration of said institutions that any advertisement or published materials using the name of the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board or the Arkansas Division of Higher Education must contain the following statement:

> Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board certification does not constitute an endorsement of any institution or program. Such certification merely indicates that certain criteria have been met as required under the rules and regulations implementing institutional and program certification as defined in A.C.A. §6-61-301.

Initial Program Certifications – Distance Technology

Evangel University, Springfield, Missouri
San Jose State University, San Jose, California
Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Initial Program Certifications – Arkansas Campus

Arkansas Colleges of Health Education, Fort Smith, Arkansas

Initial Program Certification – New Institution – Distance Technology

Community Christian College, Quartzsite, Arizona

Dr. Katherine Dudley moved to approve Agenda Item No. 22. Graycen Bigger seconded the motion and the Board unanimously approved.

Agenda Items No. 23 & 24
Out-of-State and Arkansas Private Institutions
Letters of Notification and Letters of Intent

The Commissioner of the Arkansas Division of Higher Education approved institutional requests for new programs not requiring Board action unless further review is requested by the Board. During this period, the Institutional Certification Advisory Committee received notice of requests from out-of-state and Arkansas private institutions to offer degree programs to Arkansas residents. The program notice lists appear in the Letters of Notification on pages 23-1 through 23-9 and in the Letters of Intent on page 24-1 of the agenda book.

There were no questions.

Remarks by Presidents/Chancellors and Guest

The next quarterly meeting will be held on April 24, 2026, at Ozarka College in Melbourne at 9:00 a.m.

With no further comments, the meeting was adjourned at 11:21 a.m.

SUBMITTED BY:

_____
Nichole Abernathy

APPROVED:

_____
Dr. Katherine Dudley, Secretary