**MINUTES OF THE WINDHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT**
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Meeting No. 355

The Windham School District Board of Trustees met in session on Thursday, August 27, 2026, at the Stella Hotel in Bryan, Texas.

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| **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** | Eric J.R. Nichols, Chair<br>General Bill Welch, Vice-Chair<br>Sydney Zuiker, Secretary<br>Honorable Faith Johnson<br>Pastor Nate Sprinkle<br>Tom Fordyce<br>Martin Garza |
| **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** | Dr. Rodney Burrow<br>Ambassador Sichan Siv |
| **WINDHAM STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:** | Kristina Hartman, Superintendent<br>Robert O'Banion<br>Kevin Sawnick<br>Erik Brown<br>Danielle Nicholes<br>Michelle Owen<br>Michelle Lewis<br>Luann Pickett<br>Jason Evans<br>Braydon Maxwell<br>Jack Herrington<br>Jeffery Flowers<br>Laurie Olivarez<br>Azure Mach<br>Felicia Johnson<br>Kimberly Calhoun<br>Jennifer Smock<br>Rachel Taylor |

## CONVENED

Chairman Eric J.R. Nichols convened the meeting of the 355th Windham School District (WSD) Board of Trustees (Board) to order on Thursday, August 27, 2026, at 1:16 p.m. in accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code, the *Open Meetings Act*. A quorum was present, and

the meeting was declared open. The meeting recessed at 1:17 p.m. and reconvened in executive session at 1:21 p.m. At 1:35 p.m., Chairman Nichols adjourned the executive session and reconvened regular session at 1:45 p.m. During the regular session, the Board conducted business from the agenda posted in the Texas Register.

Chairman Nichols reported that the WSD Board was committed to providing the opportunity for public presentations on posted agenda topics as well as for public comments on issues within its jurisdiction as provided in Board Rule 300.1. One speaker registration card was received by the Board staff and one public presentation on posted agenda topics was heard.

## CONSIDERATION OF APPROVAL OF CONSENT ITEMS

The Chairman called the Board's attention to the Consent Items on the agenda, which consisted of the minutes of the June 19, 2026 meeting, appraisers for the 2026-2027 school year, excused absences and personal property donations.

There being no other comments, objections or amendments to the Consent Items, the Consent Items were approved as submitted.

## RECOGNITIONS

Department Director of Instruction Luann Pickett recognized Ms. Jennifer Smock for her selection as Windham School District's Library Services administrator. Ms. Pickett said that Ms. Smock began her career in education as an elementary teacher with Huntsville Independent School District (ISD) before joining Windham as a teacher. She later returned to Huntsville ISD and spent nine years as the innovative learning specialist at Estella Stewart Elementary School within the library. In February 2026, Ms. Smock returned to Windham as the Library Services administrator.

Ms. Pickett said since assuming the role, Ms. Smock has supported consistent access to literacy and educational resources across the district while introducing innovative ideas to enhance and modernize campus library services. She explained her efforts have helped expand resources and improve the overall library experience for patrons. Additionally, Ms. Pickett said Ms. Smock has worked closely with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice on implementing the new book donations process. Ms. Pickett presented that as Library Services administrator, Ms. Smock is excited to share her passion for literacy with students and patrons, expanding opportunities for reading and learning while making a lasting impact across the state and inspiring as many readers as possible. In May 2026, Ms. Smock was named Best Librarian in the Huntsville Item's Readers' Choice Awards. The district is proud of this accomplishment and grateful to have Ms. Smock on the Windham team. Ms. Smock earned a Bachelor of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies from Sam Houston State University and is certified as an Early Childhood through Grade Four educator. Inspired by the impact libraries can have on individuals and communities, she returned to Sam Houston State University to earn a Master of Library Science degree and became a Texas Certified School Librarian.

Ms. Pickett presented that outside of work, Ms. Smock enjoys spending time with her husband,

daughter and three dogs, listening to audiobooks and podcasts, volunteering with the Huntsville Junior Service League and shopping. She also enjoys supporting her daughter as she competes in swimming and participates in dance, as well as cheering on her nephew at baseball games. Ms. Pickett asked the Board to please join her in welcoming Ms. Smock to the district and expressing appreciation for the energy, innovation and leadership she has brought to her role.

Ms. Smock thanked the Board and expressed sincere appreciation for her role with the district. On behalf of the Board, the Chairman noted appreciation for the work of library professionals across the district. He talked about relevant programs within the libraries. He once again thanked Ms. Smock and noted the importance of her role.

Next, Division Director of Instruction Kevin Sawnick recognized Mr. Braydon Maxwell on his promotion to Panhandle regional principal. Mr. Sawnick presented that Mr. Maxwell began his career in education as a middle school social studies teacher in Mathis Independent School District, where he developed a passion for serving at-risk students. He said during his time in the classroom, he also emerged as a leader in instructional technology, spearheading technology integration efforts at both the campus and district levels and presenting at numerous regional and statewide technology conferences. Mr. Sawnick noted that Mr. Maxwell's success as an educator naturally led him into school leadership. After five years in the classroom, Mr. Maxwell transitioned into administration, serving as a high school assistant principal.

Mr. Sawnick said driven by his commitment to expanding educational opportunities for at-risk learners, Mr. Maxwell joined Windham School District in June 2023 and has since served as principal across multiple campuses. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Maxwell has worked to improve student outcomes, strengthen campus culture and support educational programs across all learning environments. He said he was entrusted with the unique opportunity to help reopen the Garza East campus, where he led efforts to establish a strong instructional foundation, built a high-performing team and created a student-centered culture. Under his leadership, the campus earned an A accountability rating following its reopening in the 2024-2025 school year, reflecting significant academic growth and a shared commitment to excellence.

Mr. Sawnick presented through his leadership and dedication to student success, Mr. Maxwell has made a meaningful difference in the lives of countless students, staff and the community.

Mr. Sawnick asked the Board to please join him in congratulating Mr. Maxwell on his well-deserved promotion and celebrating the positive impact he will continue to make in the Panhandle region.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Sawnick and asked Mr. Maxwell to approach the podium to say a few words. Mr. Maxwell thanked the Board for the recognition and noted his appreciation for the opportunity to work with the district. He presented that he enjoys working alongside peers who are dedicated to making a difference every day. He once again thanked the Board.

The Chairman said the Board has noticed Mr. Maxwell's progression with the district and expressed appreciation on behalf of the Board members. He once again thanked him.

## REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN, WSD BOARD OF TRUSTEES

### Modernizing Windham's Onboarding Process

Chairman Nichols presented that as meeting attendees know, a central focus area for the Board is to support ongoing efforts at the agencies they oversee to modernize their workforce practices and workplace environments. He said this area of emphasis obviously includes full support of the responsible and cost-effective use of technology as part of the strategy to achieve those goals. The Chairman said that in his report, he would spotlight the recent efforts of Windham to modernize Human Resources (HR) operations as a whole and specifically by enhancing the new employee experience through targeted onboarding and professional support. He said these improvements have been designed to increase efficiency, strengthen communication and better equip Windham employees for success in their roles.

Chairman Nichols said the district has invested in a fully electronic records management and applicant tracking system, marking a significant step forward in modernizing HR operations. He noted that while the Board understands that a comprehensive report will be presented at a future meeting once implementation is complete, several key enhancements are worth highlighting at this time.

The Chairman presented that the Board understands that under the new system, all onboarding paperwork will be completed before a new employee arrives for New Hire orientation. This includes tasks such as establishing direct deposit, selecting benefits and completing required employment documentation. He said by streamlining these processes electronically, Windham is creating an onboarding system that is much more in keeping with the expectations of persons who grew up using technology and online job and career platforms. Instead of focusing on paper-based onboarding at orientation, employees will be able to focus on what they need to learn at their New Hire orientation to become a contributing team member from day one of employment.

Chairman Nichols said Windham's electronic records system will also serve as a centralized employee profile for each staff member. Important documents, including employee evaluations, tuition reimbursement records and other employment-related information, will be securely maintained within a single digital platform rather than relying solely on paper files. He said this will improve record accessibility, organization and long-term document management. The Chairman noted this is very consistent with improvements that the Board will be discussing regarding the student population at the next day's Texas Board of Criminal Justice meeting.

The Chairman presented that another component of this initiative is the implementation of the applicant tracking system. He said through this platform, applicants and hiring supervisors will receive automatic notifications as candidates advance through each stage of the hiring process. These real-time updates will enhance communication, improve transparency and create a more efficient experience for everyone. The Chairman noted that he has often heard in both the private world and on the TDCJ side that if there is not a system that engages with prospective employees immediately upon application or indication of interest, they are behind the marketplace. If a potential employer is not being responsive to candidates promptly, they will lose them, especially in this modern time of a flood of electronic information available about job and career

opportunities. He also explained that things have changed in terms of workplace expectations. The Chairman said gone are the days from expecting good recruiting results from having applications or expressions of interest sit on a desk or in a cubicle for days or weeks. He said the modern workforce does not work that way and employers are not recognizing that they are losing out on opportunities to hire the next great generation of employees

Chairman Nichols said to enhance the employee experience further, the district is reimagining its New Hire process to create a more effective and engaging onboarding experience. He explained historically, new employees from across the district have spent an entire week in Huntsville completing required security training and job-specific instruction before reporting to their campuses or departments. While valuable, the Chairman said this approach often resulted in participants receiving a large volume of information in a short period of time, in the abstract and not in the context of their day-to-day as a Windham team member.

The Chairman presented that to support this transition, the Board understands that the Division of Instruction recently brought together regional specialists and coordinators for a two-day workshop titled, *Specialists and Coordinators Advancing Leadership and Excellence (SCALE) Across Texas*. He said the workshop focused on team building, collaborative discussions, leadership development and reinforcing the importance of service-centered support while coordinating a potential training structure for revised New Hire processes. Participants examined the value of meaningful campus engagement, the importance of follow-through after campus visits and the critical role they play in supporting educators and administrators.

Chairman Nichols said the Board understands that regional specialists and coordinators serve as an essential connection between campuses and district administration, providing guidance, resources and ongoing support throughout the year. He presented for example, Academic and Instructional Technology specialists introduce new technologies into the classroom while providing continued training and coaching for teachers. College and Career Readiness coordinators support student advisors in helping students access postsecondary opportunities while also assisting with Criminal History Evaluation Letters submitted to the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation for those pursuing trades that require occupational licenses. He noted that these examples represent only a small portion of the valuable work performed by these regional teams.

The Chairman said to better utilize this expertise and establish meaningful connections earlier in an employee's tenure, the New Hire process will transition to a new model beginning in 2027. New employees will spend three days in Huntsville completing essential security training before reporting to their assigned campuses for the remainder of the week. The Chairman noted the similarities to TDCJ as they conduct on the job training for new cadets. He explained there, they will begin hands-on onboarding activities, participate in virtual meetings and receive direct support from regional coordinators and specialists. Chairman Nichols presented that this approach allows employees to apply new concepts in real time within their actual work environment. He said by blending foundational training with immediate, job-specific support, the district is creating a more effective onboarding experience that better prepares employees for long-term success.

Chairman Nichols presented that the Board fully understands and appreciates Windham's investments in modernized HR systems and a redesigned onboarding experience to reflect a continued commitment to organizational excellence. He said as implementation continues, the Board looks forward to hearing additional updates and demonstrating how these improvements will strengthen the district's ability to recruit, support and retain high-quality staff across the district.

This concluded the Chairman's report.

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

### Coalition Building and Collaboration

Superintendent Kristina Hartman presented for her report, she would be speaking about recent coalition building and collaboration within the district and its TDCJ partners. She said the past several months have been marked by significant progress in increasing access to education, strengthening strategic partnerships and highlighting the work taking place across Windham School District. From observing national best practices within education in corrections to engaging with legislative offices and community partners, she was pleased to share several initiatives that are helping shape opportunities for the students and communities the district serves.

The Superintendent said in June, she joined Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) representatives Jason Clark, Chief Programs Officer, and April Zamora, Rehabilitation and Reentry Division Director, along with Cole Meyer, a policy analyst with Texas Appleseed, on a visit to Maine to tour innovative education in corrections programs at the Maine Correctional and Women's Reentry Center and Maine State Prison.

Superintendent Hartman presented that one of the most notable practices they observed was secure Wi-Fi technology in both classroom and housing environments. She said students utilize laptops that allow them to complete postsecondary coursework through a combination of on-site instruction and online college courses, which are taken alongside traditional college students. Ms. Hartman noted this approach offers greater flexibility and access to higher education while providing valuable insight into emerging technologies and instructional models that may help inform future planning efforts across Texas, especially as the district continues implementing connectivity and student devices within its own classrooms. She said the district was happy to highlight that the O'Daniel campus will be the first to pilot connected student laptops in the education department and a specialized education dorm for students participating in the University of Houston Clear Lake master's degree program that is scheduled to launch in January, 2027. While in Maine, she said their group also observed maximized use of space through community gardens, kitchens in incentivized housing units and peer support during the disciplinary and grievance processes.

Superintendent Hartman presented that Windham representatives recently participated in a new Manufacturing Career Pathways initiative at the Dominguez campus. She said this initiative brings together local manufacturing employers, Toyotetsu and Steve's Doors with more to come, TDCJ's Rehabilitation and Reentry and Parole Divisions, local higher education partners San Antonio College and the University of Texas San Antonio and advocacy and non-profit

organizations including the Manufacturing Institute and Texas Center for Higher Education in Prison. She said the day started with a tour of the Dominguez campus programs, with an emphasis on the progression from literacy to life skills to the Production Technician career and technical education program.

The Superintendent explained that the project aims to strengthen connections between workforce training during incarceration and meaningful employment prior to and following reentry. She noted according to the U.S. Department of Labor, more than 963,000 production occupations are projected to open annually through 2034, creating substantial demand for skilled workers. Ms. Hartman said the district was pleased and surprised to see that the Manufacturing Institute recently published an article in their national newsletter highlighting the program at Dominguez with an emphasis on the talent pipeline from prison to employment in the manufacturing field.

Superintendent Hartman presented that Windham also welcomed staff from Senator Donna Campbell's Office to several campuses across the Central Texas region. She said the visit included tours of the Hilltop, Murray and O'Daniel campuses, where attendees observed Mireles High School programming, academic instruction, life skills courses and career and technical education. Ms. Hartman said that whenever individuals visit the O'Daniel campus, they always try out the truck driving simulator and that this is something they will keep in mind during legislative session as they talk about technology and the needs within education in corrections. She said visitors from Senator Campbell's Office also toured the Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment (STRIVE) program and *The ECHO.* Ms. Hartman presented that the district also invited its partners from Central Texas College (CTC) to join the tour and conversations highlighted opportunities to further enhance dual-credit offerings and expand career and technical education pathways. She noted that CTC has since submitted an application to the Postsecondary Advisory Board requesting program expansion for women.

The Superintendent said these visits provide important opportunities to increase awareness among Texas policymakers about Windham's mission and the impact of education in corrections as preparations begin for the upcoming legislative session. She noted that the intentional connections developed by staff continue to elevate understanding of the life-changing work occurring throughout the district.

Superintendent Hartman presented that she wanted to highlight a recent report from Texas 2036 titled *Opening More Doors: Data, Progress and Opportunities for Higher Education in Texas Prisons*, a report examining the growth of postsecondary education in Texas following passage of Senate Bill 2405, the Sunset Bill, during the 89th Texas Legislature. She said the report, authored by Luis Soberon, Senior Policy Advisor and in-house counsel, highlights early successes within the administration of prison higher education programs through Windham and reinforces the benefits of increasing access to these opportunities along with suggestions for the future. Ms. Hartman explained that this was a really positive report. She said it has been circulated among the lawmaking offices and the district is very grateful that Texas 2036 came to the district every step of the way to verify data to ensure that the program listing they had were accurate and to discuss things in terms of content for the report. Ms. Hartman said she was very pleased to see that collaboration occurred prior to publication.

The Superintendent further explained that among the report's findings, seven new colleges and universities have been approved to offer programs within TDCJ since implementation of Senate

Bill 2405. She said more than 6,200 unique course enrollments were recorded during Fall 2025 across 15 higher education institutions. Ms. Hartman noted these accomplishments reflect the dedication of the district's college partners, the invaluable partnership and support of TDCJ, higher education institutions and the outstanding work of the district's College and Career Readiness team to expand access throughout the Texas prisons.

Superintendent Hartman presented that the district's most recent pilot stemmed from attendance at the Gulf Coast Workforce Board Strategic Collaboration Session on Education and Workforce Alignment at Lone Star College in The Woodlands. She said this was an excellent data-driven session on labor market projections, wage earnings and indicators of general success. Connections were made with the executive director of the Gulf Coast Workforce Solutions, who shared her experience at one of Windham's recent College and Career Days and with the Education Service Center Region 6 contact for community referrals. Ms. Hartman said the Board may recall her ride-along and office visit she conducted with the Parole Division. She explained that is where the district saw the need to work with these community partners to make sure they are supporting people who will soon be joining Texas communities. Ms. Hartman said she's worked closely with April Zamora and there is an upcoming tour of the Ferguson campus with Workforce Solutions, the Parole Division and the Education Service Center. She noted this will be a neat opportunity as they begin piloting in the Huntsville area, students returning to the community with pre-reentry education referrals. She said they hear a lot about pre-reentry employment but this is going to be pre-reentry enrollment in either college programs where they've already been accepted or if its someone that hasn't finished their high school equivalency or CTE, their records transfer will occur. From there, they'll get them on a conference call with the community provider so that there is a really smooth transition from the corrections setting to the community. She said as a bonus for the tour, the Culinary Arts students at Ferguson will be preparing a meal and noted what a nice addition this is for not only visitors but the students as they get to practice the skills they're learning in the classroom.

The Superintendent said that some upcoming initiatives include continued training on responsible and permissible use of artificial intelligence (AI). She explained earlier that week, the district received the results of its staff survey related to staff's comfort and familiarity with AI. She noted staff provided some feedback on different training resources they would like to access and different ways in which they can use it.

Superintendent Hartman concluded by adding that the district is grateful for its partners within Texas and other states that are actively engaging to share ideas. She said she was at the federal prison in Bryan, Texas the day before for the first time. Ms. Hartman said she saw their certified nursing assistant program, which is something the district does not yet have. She noted that Windham was also able to share some ideas with them for broadening programs there. Ms. Hartman presented that the district has already engaged with Maine and a meeting is scheduled with New York and she has communication from Oklahoma. She said Windham is highly collaborative and she is proud of the team for Texas being the ones who receive the calls and contacts when there is a need for some support and technical assistance. Windham also appreciates learning from other states as well.

This concluded the Superintendent's report.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Hartman for her report. He asked the Board if they had any follow up

questions. Board Secretary Sydney Zuiker asked the Superintendent if the district would be able to track completion of education pre-release referrals. Ms. Hartman said the district is in the process of developing a memorandum of understanding with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. She explained that one of the associated components is the enrollment upon reentry and that the Texas Workforce Commission maintains a lot of the data for the students who are going to access adult education in the community and the district already has a data sharing agreement with them. Ms. Hartman said that is a good flag for the district and is certainly worth tracking.

The Chairman asked if the Board could receive copies of the aforementioned Texas 2036 report. Superintendent Hartman said the district would coordinate that. The Chairman expressed the value of the report and asked the Superintendent to explain the process the district engaged in to get input from outside groups. Ms. Hartman presented that postsecondary is a great example where you see it codified in statue the Postsecondary Education Advisory Board. She said the Advisory Board convenes regularly and includes a representative of students, a representative of an organization that supports families of students, the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. She added that there is also a consortium for higher education in Texas prisons and a representative from that group also sits on the Advisory Board. She said they are all consistently seeking feedback from stakeholders and she believes this is likely one of the reasons they are able to maintain rapport with advocacy groups because they not only accept feedback from them, but they will also call them and ask for their opinion on certain topics. Ms. Hartman said this feedback has been extremely helpful. She presented that the coalition and collaboration building with all levels of stakeholders supports that the district can effectively meet the needs of students and the community at the same time.

Chairman Nichols further commented on the aforementioned visit from Senator Donna Campbell's Office. He asked Superintendent Hartman if these types of visits from legislators and members of their staff were welcomed regularly. Ms. Hartman said the district does welcome these types of visits and mentioned that the regional principals were recently briefed on how to interact with elected officials in their respective areas. She noted this training will also be passed down to campus principals. Ms. Hartman said they also conduct visits to these offices to introduce themselves and the district, with the invitation always being extended to these officials for a formal visit to the campuses in their areas. She said that she understands that TDCJ also extends this same invitation. Chairman Nichols said that on behalf of the Board, they thank Senator Campbell and her staff for visiting. He noted that there are many other legislators who also take advantage of the opportunity to interact with campuses and TDCJ.

There were no further questions or comments from the Board.

**DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING THE WINDHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT FISCAL YEAR 2027 PROPOSED OPERATING**

## BUDGET AND FISCAL YEARS 2028-2029 LEGISLATIVE APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST

Chairman Nichols welcomed Robert O'Banion, Chief Financial Officer, to the podium and noted that prior to this meeting, each of the Board members individually met with Windham finance leaders and reviewed details of the proposed operating budget and legislative appropriations request. The Chairman thanked each of the Board members for their detailed review. He asked Mr. O'Banion to please proceed.

Mr. O'Banion thanked the Board for the opportunity to discuss Windham's budget and salary schedule for the 2026-2027 school year as well as the district's legislative appropriations exceptional item request. He began by sharing the positive initiatives the district has planned for the upcoming school year as outlined within the 2026-2027 budget.

Mr. O'Banion asked the Board to turn to page three in their budget books to see the total revenue increase of $460,000 for fiscal year 27 for a total amount of $93,972,498. He said the fluctuations from the prior year are primarily driven by increases in grant funds from the award of the Jobs and Education for Texans grant from the Texas Workforce Commission to support career and technical education for the Industrial Maintenance Tech program at the Plane campus.

Mr. O'Banion presented the "all funds" budgeted expenditures increased for FY27 by 5.4% or $5.5 million to $106,964,291. He said the FY27 recommended budget includes expenses for 32.5 additional teaching positions and 23 additional support staff to accommodate the growing number of eligible students. This over $3 million increase in expenses is expected to be gradual during the year as the district continues new recruitment initiatives of hiring retirees, meeting capacity goals within accountability and implementing solid recruitment strategies. Mr. O'Banion presented that the FY27 recommended budget includes multiples one-time expenses for various initiatives, which include $915,000 to continue expanding classroom connectivity, which he said is done utilizing one-time appropriated funds and in partnership with the TDCJ Information and Technology Division to ensure infrastructure and implementation does not duplicate services. He said it also includes $2.1 million to introduce and expand instruction technology devices for students and $1.3 million for additional student computer lab devices, teacher and support staff laptops and other information technology contracted services.

Mr. O'Banion presented that the remaining pages of the budget book reflect the district's different salary plans, which he said overall remains consistent with the schedule presented last school year as the Human Resources department continues its classification study.

Mr. O'Banion said the second component of his presentation is in preparation of the upcoming legislative session. He said the district is requesting approval to submit an exceptional item request to the legislature of $6,849,397 each year of the upcoming 28-29 biennium. He noted this request includes two components. He said first, $3.4 million year for an additional 36 teacher positions and 15 support staff positions to expand services at 32 campuses. Mr. O'Banion presented these additional positions are expected to support 255 more students achieving their high school equivalency certificates, 3,808 additional industry-based certifications earned and almost one million additional contact hours each year. He said the second component of this

request is for $3.4 million each year to support on-going instructional technology costs for the district's instructional technology plan. Components of this include network management for student-secure access, which equates to $1.3 million per year, reoccurring bandwidth charges, which equates to $550,000 per year, and equipment maintenance, which equates to $1.5 million per year. Mr. O'Banion stated this exceptional item request will be provided to the Texas Education Agency and is included in their request to the Legislative Budget Board.

Mr. O'Banion thanked the Board again for their time as the district met with each of them about the budget and exceptional item request. Additionally, on behalf of Windham leadership, he thanked the district's Finance and Human Resources teams that contributed significantly to creating the budget. He also acknowledged the work of Department Director of Business Services, Michelle Owen, for her service as she would be retiring on August 31. The Chairman asked Mr. O'Banion if any other members of the Business Services team were in attendance. Mr. O'Banion also acknowledge Michelle Lewis, who would be taking over as Department Director of Business Services, effective September 1. Chairman Nichols asked members of the finance team to stand to be recognized.

This concluded his report. Mr. O'Banion asked the Board to approve the 2026-2027 budget and the legislative appropriations and exceptional item request as presented. He paused for questions.

Chairman Nichols stated the Board is respectful of individuals who step forward for public comment. He presented that there was one registered speaker related to this particular agenda item related to the district's budget. He asked for Jennifer Toon to approach the podium. The Chairman stated that for public comments on issues within the jurisdiction of the Board, they received her registration card. He said her comment time is set at three minutes and there is a red light that notifies presenters when their time is expired. The Chairman discussed core principles of respectful comment. He invited Ms. Toon to begin providing her thoughts related to this agenda item.

Ms. Toon thanked the Board for allowing her to speak and began by sharing her appreciation for and experiences with Windham. She highlighted the Texas 2036 report, sharing that provides evidence on decisions made by the Sunset Commission to transfer administration of higher education services to Windham. Ms. Toon said the master's program addition mentioned during Superintendent Hartman's report is an example of when advocacy and agencies work together to make sure that women within incarceration have what they need to participate in higher education the way they wish to. She stated the Texas 2036 report does also highlight areas where Windham can continue to grow and said advocacy groups are still awaiting an update on Pell grants available to women participating in the bachelor programs and services being available in rural areas. Ms. Toon said these are examples of things Windham can continue to work on with investment to continue building on the success that is already taking place.

In relation to Windham's budget specifically, Ms. Toon asked the Board to please continue to invest in making sure that incarcerated students have the technology, including laptops, and the things they need to really understand what it is like to go out in the world and be a student. She discussed her experiences as a higher education student both in prison and out in the community. Ms. Toon reiterated the need to help students understand what it is like to be a student in all

capacities and current environments, as she said this contributes to their overall reentry success.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Toon for her comments related to technology and its importance. He followed up with her regarding her comment on services available in rural areas. The Chairman said through his work alongside Windham and its management, he understands that the district is making strides to see what they can do to provide services in areas that may not have the resources in comparison to more urban areas. He discussed the importance of getting individuals talking about Windham and the work the district does, not only to bring awareness but to potentially recruit staff. He once again expressed the importance of this messaging, particularly to those rural areas where recruitment may seem limited.

This concluded Ms. Toon's public comment and the Chairman asked Mr. O'Banion to once again approach the podium for further questions from the Board.

Pastor Nate Sprinkle asked for confirmation regarding the increased number of full-time district employees. Mr. O'Banion confirmed that in the proposed budget, the number of full-time employees would be increasing by 55.5. He clarified the number of filled positions noted in the budget books. Pastor Sprinkle asked for further clarification on these numbers in relation to the legislative appropriations request. Mr. O'Banion said the district is asking for funding to account for the costs related to those additional teaching and support staff positions.

Board Secretary Sydney Zuiker thanked Windham and its team for the thought behind how to fill and obtain the additional positions while taking ideas into consideration. Ms. Zuiker expressed appreciation for the individual budget briefing and commented about the thoughtful creativity related to how the district can reach more students. She also pointed out the increased number of contact hours with students, which is projected to be a million additional hours with the requested funding. Ms. Zuiker reiterated the importance of expanding the district's reach and services to as many students as possible.

Vice-Chair General Bill Welch acknowledged the effort and experience needed to put together a large budget. General Welch thanked Mr. O'Banion and team for the detail of the budget. He said the thoughtfulness and consideration for various areas of constant improvement within the district was unbelievable and said this requires complete coordination across all staff levels. He once again thanked everyone for their contributions and said the detailed budget gives Board members great insight into what the district is capable of doing.

The Chairman asked Mr. O'Banion how the district is doing in terms of teacher compensation and salary scale compared to other school districts. Mr. O'Banion said the district has received great support from the legislature in recent years and Windham was able to provide an almost 20% salary increase to staff over the last number of sessions, including last session when House Bill 2 was passed which impacted all teachers. He said Windham was fortunate to be included in that. Mr. O'Banion presented that the Texas Education Agency projects teacher salaries stand around $64,000 on average per teacher. He said Windham teachers earn on average $74,000, with that number being impacted by their step, or otherwise known as their years of experience. Mr. O'Banion stated Windham teachers average around 14 years of experience. He further explained Windham's teacher salary steps and pay scale. Chairman Nichols asked if teachers

transitioning from another school district in Texas are still considered for the same type of teacher benefits and retirement systems. Superintendent Hartman confirmed that their years of service will transfer over to Windham and explained that there is a verification process.

Superintendent Hartman said the district is looking at the lower-level steps of the teacher pay scale because Windham is looking to recruit younger teachers coming out of school, as they have experience with the newest technology and can contribute that knowledge to the Windham team. Chairman Nichols asked Ms. Hartman to elaborate on the district's program for individuals that may not quite have their teaching certificate and how that could help the district recruit teachers. Ms. Hartman said the district worked with the Texas Education Agency to allow teachers to do their internships with Windham and they can seek alternative certification through Windham as their employer. She noted the Human Resources team and General Counsel are working on policy updates to afford the district the opportunity to bring in these individuals on a probationary certificate and then have them transition to a professional certificate with Windham. Ms. Zuiker asked for clarification regarding if this applies to a student teaching type internship or if this program goes beyond that. Ms. Hartman said it could be the student teaching experience and described other scenarios this applies to.

Chairman Nichols asked Mr. O'Banion to elaborate on the type of connectivity and collaboration that the budget applies to. Mr. O'Banion explained the three-year connectivity plan that kickstarted in the 2025-2026 school year. He said campuses will receive bandwidth connectivity and wireless access points so all devices can be securely connected wirelessly to the internet. He described student assessments availability and the technology-enhanced classroom environments. He also explained the type of technology that will be utilized in the classroom, which include student laptops and additional virtual reality simulators and headsets. Superintendent Hartman added that this puts Windham students in a similar position to that of students in the community so that they are able to jump into the current workforce environment upon reentry. She said the district continues to meet regularly with TDCJ to continue planned collaboration so that they are not duplicating efforts and ensuring the resources are adequate for what Windham and TDCJ both need. Ms. Hartman also explained the mindfulness of funding for connectivity and bandwidth purposes.

The Chairman once again expressed appreciation for the detailed reports and budget considerations.

Chairman Nichols asked the Board for a motion.

> *Vice-Chair Welch moved to amend the proposed budget and salary schedule by changing the Superintendent's salary from $199,500 to $225,000. He further moved that the Windham School District Board of Trustees approve the budget and salary schedule for the 2026-2027 school year as amended and authorize the Superintendent to make transfers as necessary as authorized by Board policy.*
>
> *Secretary Sydney Zuiker seconded the motion, which prevailed unanimously when called to vote.*

## DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION, AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING CONTRACTS OVER $500,000

Mr. O'Banion presented that he was requesting approval for a contract over $500,000. He said this contract is in support of Windham's role as administrator for postsecondary education programs offered by institutions of higher education within TDCJ and the first contract Windham has presented under the postsecondary memorandum of understanding with TDCJ. Mr. O'Banion said the district is requesting approval for a contract with Lee College in the amount of $786,240 to continue provision of for-credit certificate and associate degree programs at nine campuses.

Mr. O'Banion said he was pleased to share that Lee College recently celebrated 60 years of service within the correctional environment and that the agreement is for school year 2026-2027 and ends August 31, 2027. He further stated funding for this contract is included in next year's budget.

This concluded his report and he paused for questions.

The Chairman asked Superintendent Hartman to comment on the contributions of Lee College to education in corrections. She described the long-standing partnership and collaboration between the college, Windham and TDCJ and said they are a premier provider of education in Texas communities and in corrections in general. Ms. Hartman described their 60-year celebration and its impact on all in attendance. She said that the college recently received approval for a new Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning program at Plane, with approval coming from the Advisory Board and TDCJ. She thanked TDCJ's Facilities Division for their collaboration in kickstarting new technical programs and said the district looks forward to celebrating Lee College's impressive milestone for the remainder of the year.

The Chairman echoed Ms. Hartman's sentiments and further described the impact of the 60-year celebration, which included hearing from alumni.

Chairman Nichols asked the Board for a motion.

> *Secretary Sydney Zuiker moved that the Windham School District Board of Trustees approve the contracts over $500,000 as presented.*
>
> > *Pastor Nate Sprinkle seconded the motion, which prevailed unanimously when called to vote.*

## DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION, AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING PROPOSED REVISION OF WINDHAM BOARD POLICY WBP-07.01, "EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONNEL"

General Counsel Erik Brown presented that a revision to this policy would allow job openings to be announced internally and filled by current employees before posting outside the district. He said this may be helpful when a position requires specialized knowledge or there is a large number of qualified internal applicants. He noted the rest of the proposed revisions are meant to improve formatting, clarity and readability. He paused for questions.

Chairman Nichols asked the Board for a motion.

*Pastor Nate Sprinkle moved that the Windham School District Board of Trustees approve the revision of Windham Board Policy WBP-07.01, "Employment of Personnel" as presented.*

*Vice-Chair General Bill Welch seconded the motion, which prevailed unanimously when called to vote.*

**DISCUSSION, CONSIDERATION, AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING PROPOSED REVISION OF WINDHAM BOARD POLICY WMP-07.53, "ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE"**

General Counsel Erik Brown presented that the proposed revisions to this policy would create "hazardous weather leave" as a type of district administrative leave and allow the Superintendent to authorize districtwide administrative leave with prior notification to the Board office. Additionally, he said the revisions would expand the categories of familial relationships applicable to bereavement leave. He noted the rest of the proposed revisions are meant to improve formatting, clarity and readability. He paused for any questions.

Chairman Nichols asked the Board for a motion.

*Board member Martin Garza, Jr. moved that the Windham School District Board of Trustees approve the revision of Windham Board Policy WBP-07.53, "Administrative Leave" as presented.*

*Honorable Faith Johnson seconded the motion, which prevailed unanimously when called to vote.*

Chairman Nichols thanked everyone for attending the meeting and announced the next meeting of the WSD Board of Trustees will be on November 6, 2026 in Huntsville, Texas.

**ADJOURNED**

There being no further business for the regular session, Chairman Nichols adjourned the 355th meeting of the Windham School District Board of Trustees at 3:02 p.m.

Chairman

Secretary

*Note: Referenced attachments for draft minutes are available upon request. Following approval of the minutes, attachments will be maintained with the signed minutes in the Office of Record.*