



Our Mission: We disrupt generational poverty through a primary focus on children & young adults and the specific challenges they face at distinct stages of life.

**Northwestern University Settlement Association
Regular Meeting of the Executive Committee**

**1400 W. Augusta Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60642
Guild Hall**

Executive Committee members present in person: Chair Amy O'Donnell, Robert Best, Larry Weithers, William Welnhofner, Sami ElSaden.

Board of Directors members present on Zoom: William Rowe.

Staff present in person: CEO Carole Wood, CFOO Christian Feaman, Danielle LaPointe Chief of Staff, Assistant Secretary Alison Armstead.

Amy O'Donnell, Board of Directors Chair, called the meeting to order 12:00 PM.

Amy requested for the Assistant Secretary Alison Armstead to take the roll.

Public comment

No members of the public present for public comment.

Approval of Minutes

Sami ElSaden made a motion to approve the of the February 24, 2025 meeting minutes. William Welnhofner seconded the motion. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote.

Board Chair's Report

Amy O'Donnell delivered brief remarks under the Board Chair Report, focusing on acknowledgments and upcoming governance items.

Amy began by expressing her gratitude to the Winnetka Board for hosting a successful wine event.

She also extended thanks to the North Shore Board for their annual luncheon.

Amy acknowledged Kathy and Mike Elliot for coordinating a special visit by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) to Rowe Elementary. The CSO gave a live string demonstration featuring the violin, cello, and bass. Amy attended the event and noted how much the students enjoyed the experience. She added that the school hoped to further develop this partnership with the CSO.

Amy announced that the Vittum Society Brunch would take place on June 25 at Skokie Country Club. The brunch honors individuals who have included Northwestern Settlement in their estate planning.

In closing, she addressed upcoming governance items. Kathy Elliot and Alison would be coordinating the distribution of the annual board survey, with the aim of sending it out by the end of the current week. The results would be used to review

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and finalize the board slate and committee chair assignments ahead of the full board meeting at the end of the fiscal year in June.

CEO's Report

Carole Wood provided a comprehensive update on organizational activities and key developments since the last board meeting three weeks prior. While there were no major changes, she reported that all teams had remained actively engaged in program delivery and strategic planning.

In Family Cares, the program began revisiting its MOU with Brightpoint due to Brightpoint's fiscal instability. Although maintaining the partnership remained a goal, they were reassessing the number of Brightpoint staff embedded in their programs, especially as Rowe's own capabilities had grown.

Emergency Services launched a successful backpack food distribution program for students facing weekend food insecurity. The pilot began with 80 families and had already generated a waitlist. Plans were in place to expand access to more families in the fall.

Carole noted that the free store would be fully operational, enhancing support for families by Summer 2025. Discussions were also underway about continuing services during the summer months, including assessing additional needs via family questionnaires. Out-of-school time and teen programs were progressing well, with plans to continue apprenticeship programming this summer.

At Rowe Elementary, end-of-year activities were underway, including final testing, graduation, and celebrations. Summer school planning was active, with a focus on key grade benchmarks and chronic absenteeism. A kindergarten-to-first grade boot camp was being introduced to ease transitions. Enrollment stood at 591 students, with strong outreach efforts underway targeting K–3. A recent high school acceptance signing day event was well-received by students and families.

Outdoor education was going well, with strong support from IMC and preparations nearly complete for summer camp. Summer enrollment exceeded initial plans due to high demand.

In Early Childhood Education (ECE), there were no significant updates since the Education Committee meeting. However, Carole noted an emergency meeting held by the City of Chicago regarding Head Start funding, which saw a \$14 million cut citywide. Rowe's program was not affected due to sufficient enrollment.

Moving on to development, the organization had raised \$2.6 million to date, with \$1.4 million still pending. Carole shared that while the foundation target was likely to be met, corporate and government funding would likely fall short. The development team consisted of three full-time staff, and a potential leadership hire was under consideration to strengthen fundraising efforts.

Carole emphasized that relationship-building remained key to fundraising success and noted that efforts were underway to build a stronger corporate pitch, particularly targeting Chicago's trading and finance sectors. She also highlighted the ongoing need for clear data and outcomes, referencing recent benchmarking collaborative work and the organization's push to better define and articulate impact.

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Financials

Bill Welnhofner and Christian Feaman presented an overview of the draft FY26 budget, noting that it was still being refined. Christian explained that although overall revenue was projected to decrease slightly, the team had managed to reduce expenditures — particularly personnel costs — despite across-the-board salary increases due to cost-of-living adjustments.

Savings were attributed in part to the school principal's staffing reorganization, which eliminated redundant positions. Additionally, the CPS pension "true-up" calculation for next year was expected to decrease, saving the organization a significant amount in fringe benefit expenses. The organization also achieved approximately \$50,000 in IT savings through renegotiated contracts.

Christian reported that direct student expenses were reduced slightly, and Cherry Bekaert Consulting had provided a preliminary comparative financial analysis using data from 18 similar charter schools. Though the data set still required refinement, early findings showed that Rowe spent a higher percentage on salaries including debt service and principal compensation than both the average and high-performing peer schools.

Limitations of the analysis were acknowledged, including differences in accounting practices across schools and the absence of uniform staffing models in public audits. Further refinement of the comparative model and recommendations were expected within 10 days.

Regarding enrollment, the current budget was built around 635 students, based on the "hold harmless" policy tied to last year's 20th-day count. However, CPS announced a shift to a per capita tuition cost (PCTC) model for charter schools starting in FY26, eliminating the hold harmless provision.

Under the PCTC model, Rowe expected a modest increase in per-pupil funding (estimated at 3.5%), which aligned with the assumptions built into the budget. A 15% increase in the facilities supplement also offered some relief. Importantly, the PCTC structure includes funding for special education baked into the general allocation, which benefits Rowe given its historically high SPED population.

Despite projected enrollment of only 591 students, the team confirmed that the current expense model was scaled to actual enrollment rather than the outdated hold harmless count. Under the new PCTC system, funding would be based on the 20th-day count in September 2025. If enrollment dropped to 565 students, Rowe's budget would still remain structurally sound with adequate debt service coverage and cash reserves.

Board members raised the strategic question of whether Rowe should consider planning around a smaller school size (e.g., 450 students), given enrollment trends and the difficulty in sustaining a larger footprint under current budget constraints. Christian and Bill acknowledged the complexity of this issue and the importance of analyzing fixed versus variable costs (e.g., facilities and staffing) to determine financial sustainability at different enrollment levels.

Further clarity on this issue was expected after CPS finalized FY26 funding and after receiving final recommendations from Cherry Bekaert Consulting. Christian noted that while the current budget was still valid under the PCTC assumptions, adjustments would be made as new information emerged.

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Questions /Other

The next Board of Directors meeting was scheduled for June 23, with a Special Finance Committee meeting planned for June 12. It was noted that 8th grade graduation would take place on June 13, with board members encouraged to attend.

Closed Session

Amy called for a motion to adjourn the Open Meeting and enter into Closed Session. Bob Best made a motion that the Executive Committee go to Closed Session pursuant to: (a) Section 2(c)(1) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act to consider the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of one or more specific employees; and (b) Section 2(c)(6) of the Open Meetings Act to discuss the setting of a price for sale or lease of property owned by the Settlement. Larry Weithers seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous vote. The open session was recessed at 1:49 PM and the Executive Committee went into a closed session.

Meeting adjourned 2:30 pm

Minutes submitted by Alison Armstead

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