

**MINUTES OF RETREAT OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
OF  
NORTHSTAR ACADEMIES, INC.  
March 1, 2025**

A board retreat with the Governing Board of NorthStar Academies, Inc. was held on Saturday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, at 9:00 AM. This meeting was held at EdisonLearning Headquarters- One East Broward Blvd. Suite 1599. Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33301.

The following Governing Board Members appeared in person: Chairperson, Ms. Beth Adelman; Board Treasurer, Mr. Ira Paul; Board Secretary, Mr. Douglas Shelton; and Mr. Martin Burkett.

The following guests also appeared in person: Thom Jackson, Pres. & CEO, EdisonLearning; Dr. Eunice Casey, Vice President of School Operations, EdisonLearning; Dr. Sharard Walker, Vice President of Strategic Growth and Development, NorthStar Academies; Nia Bridges, Executive Assistant, EdisonLearning; Thomas Sternberg, Tripp Scott, LLP, and Kirsty Walker, Vice President of Investments, Raymond James.

The following guests also appeared virtually *via Zoom*: Dr. Tony Arza; Arza and Associates, and Michelle Schmitt, Vice President of Finance, EdisonLearning.

The meeting was called to order at 9:28 a.m. The meeting was chaired by the Board Chair, Ms. Beth Adelman. Ms. Nia Bridges recorded the Minutes and Dr. Walker conducted a roll call. Following the roll call, a quorum was present.

There were no requests for public comment.

Dr. Tony Arza addressed the Board with legislative updates and information pertaining to key education issues, particularly a January 29, 2025 executive order aimed at ending radical indoctrination in K-12 schools. While Florida's governor has already enacted similar policies, the order ties federal funding to these principles, promoting a colorblind education and discouraging DEI programs. The focus is on teaching factual American history without promoting ideologies of inherent racism.

Furthermore, he discussed how the federal government will monitor and enforce compliance, including the potential withholding of funding. Board members stressed the importance of creating clear guidelines for teachers to navigate these changes and avoid confusion, ensuring that schools remain educational, not political entities.

Other discussions included the ongoing teacher shortage, concerns over dismantling federal funding support for teacher development, and the potential impact of changes to the Department of Education. The board emphasized the need to attract and support teachers while navigating the complexities of federal and state education policies.

Thomas Sternberg, General Counsel, reviewed and summarized the proposed revisions to the policy manual, now reduced from 58 to 33 pages, focusing on board policies, excluding employee-related ones unless requested. Board members are asked to provide feedback by email by April 7th, with a revised version to be voted on at the next board meeting.

Mr. Sternberg outlined the policy hierarchy, emphasizing that policies cannot contradict the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws. Key policies, like board membership requirements and public records management, were highlighted for review. Committees were discussed, noting that they can make recommendations but cannot vote.

Mr. Sternberg also addressed the importance of clear policies on board member conduct, preventing overreach, and maintaining transparency with public records laws. He emphasized the need for a clear separation between the board and Edison Learning to avoid conflicts. Lastly, he reminded board members to follow the Sunshine Law and use official email for board-related communications.

In terms of Strategic Planning updates Dr. Walker discussed North Star's strategic growth opportunities, emphasizing clear distinctions between NorthStar and Edison Learning, with a focus on maintaining NorthStar's unique mission and values. He highlighted the role of the Office of Strategic Growth and Development, which focuses on innovation, growth, and leveraging data-driven strategies to expand opportunities and sustainability.

NorthStar aims to align its growth with Florida's demographic trends, expanding in high-growth areas to ensure equitable program access. Strategic business partnerships, by industry for workforce development, are key to aligning academic programs with market needs. Expansion may include private and post-secondary institutions, with feasibility analyses to guide decisions.

The alumni network and ambassador program are being strengthened to increase engagement and mentorship. Branding efforts are also a priority, with a unified strategy to raise awareness of North Star's achievements, rather than focusing on Edison Learning's role. Digital marketing, including a social media strategy and video campaigns, will enhance NorthStar's visibility and footprint.

Dr. Walker also addressed stakeholder engagement, focusing on building relationships with school districts, legislators, and business leaders to increase North Star's impact. He stressed the importance of developing a stakeholder plan for each school to align with network-wide goals.

The board is encouraged to establish criteria for evaluating new opportunities to ensure alignment with NorthStar's mission. Additionally, Dr. Walker shared details about Project Heal, a grant initiative aimed at providing wellness and career technical education services to individuals affected by trauma in Broward County. If awarded, the grant would provide \$2.8 million to support enrollment, outreach, and wraparound services, benefiting both North Star students and the community.

Dr. Casey outlined a strategy to enhance school operations, focusing on improving enrollment, retention, safety, security, and high-quality education. The primary goals are to improve enrollment decisions, boost student retention and attendance, create a secure and welcoming environment, and provide equitable education while supporting staff development.

To improve enrollment, Dr. Casey emphasized building a strong brand, improving communication with prospective families, setting clear goals, and using reliable projection systems. Developing leadership models and a diverse program portfolio is also key.

For retention, the approach includes community engagement, analyzing absences, and implementing attendance strategies. Additional efforts focus on creating a positive behavior system, establishing an alumni association, offering academic counseling, expanding career

exploration, and launching reengagement initiatives. Also, safety measures include regular audits, updating surveillance systems, establishing reserves, and ensuring safety protocols align with regulations.

Dr. Casey's education goals involve maintaining high academic standards, improving literacy and numeracy, monitoring progress, and offering flexible pathways for credit recovery, AP, and dual enrollment. Classroom renovations and expanding work-based learning opportunities will further enhance education.

Lastly, staff development is a focus, with efforts to foster growth, innovation, and retention through clear roles, improved onboarding, ongoing professional development, and performance-based advancement. Long-term compensation strategies and diversity tracking will ensure a supportive, sustainable workforce. This strategy aims to create a secure, supportive, and academically rigorous environment for both students and staff.

Michelle Schmitt presented on the finance section of the strategic plan, covering several key policies and strategies. She began with the Operating and Capital Reserve Policy, which ensures financial sustainability during budget deficits by maintaining reserves to cover at least six months of operating expenses, with a portion set aside for capital expenditures like technology and security updates. The policy also defines the approval process for using these reserves.

Next, Michelle discussed the Investment Policy, which aims to maximize investment income while safeguarding school reserves. The policy focuses on protecting and growing investments, ensuring funds remain accessible for cash flow needs.

Michelle then introduced the Sustainability Study of Revenues, which explores funding opportunities beyond traditional district and state sources. This includes potential grants and revenue streams from charter schools, satellites, private charters, vocational programs, and private colleges co-located in district buildings.

Finally, Kirsty James from Raymond James presented on investments, prompting the Board Chairwoman to suggest forming an investment committee to continue the discussion.

With no further discussions, the meeting was adjourned at 1:16 p.m. on a motion by Mr. Shelton and seconded by Mr. Paul.

By: Beth Adelman  
Beth Adelman (Apr 17, 2025 10:23 EDT)

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Title: Governing Board Chairwoman