

Douglas County School District (DCSD) Board Report

Date: May 20, 2025

Meeting Overview

The Douglas County School Board convened on May 20, 2025 for their regularly scheduled school board meeting. At 4:01 PM, President Wagstaff formally called the meeting to order. Wagstaff announced the district's intention to transition future meeting broadcasts from Zoom to YouTube, a cost-saving measure projected to save approximately \$1,600 annually. This decision, previously discussed in the April 17, 2025, meeting minutes, was a recurring point of contention, as it raised concerns about public accessibility, particularly for remote participants such as parents in the Tahoe region.

Trustee Susan Jansen moved to adopt a flexible agenda and the removal of agenda item 12. This motion was seconded by Trustee Erinn Miller. The Board voted unanimously.

Agenda item 2 provided an opportunity for general public comment on matters within the Board's authority, limited to three minutes per speaker, as stipulated in the agenda. Comments could be submitted in-person, via email to suptoffice@dcasd.k12.nv.us by 12:30 PM on May 20, 2025, or virtually during the meeting. Email submissions required the commenter's full name, were posted as supplemental documents, and were provided to trustees but not read aloud, per district policy. In-person commenters were instructed to sign in, speak into the microphone, and identify themselves for the record.

Public comment opened with Leslie Hokanson who referenced the AG's findings with respect to Trustee Jensen. Trustee Jansen had previously interrupted Hokanson 35 seconds into a previous statement critiquing a board member's resignation. Jensen, citing prohibitions on quoting board members, declared Hokanson's speech disruptive and threatened her removal. The AG determined this constituted a viewpoint-based restriction, violating Hokanson's First Amendment rights and NRS provisions. Time constraints prevented a full reading of the AG's report, but Hokanson urged the public to review its detailed account of NRS violations and requested the comments be recorded for transparency. Hokanson's comments were pointedly negative and personal with respect to Jansen.

The remainder of public comment was characterized by several other commentators attacking the integrity of Trustee Jansen and calling for her resignation. One commentator spoke in defense of Jansen, noting the obvious lack of malice on Jansen's behalf. Stating that the many slanderous comments were simply an attempt to undermine the diligent work that Jansen has given to the betterment of Douglas County's children. A sentiment held by scores of Douglas County parents.

Agenda item 3 involved a recess to a closed session to discuss matters with management representatives, pursuant to NRS 288.220(4), which permits confidential discussions on labor negotiations or management issues..

Agenda item 5 comprised four consent items for en bloc approval, designed to streamline routine business: (A) Minutes of the Regular Board Meeting of April 17, 2025; (B) Accounts Payable Special and Regular Run Vouchers (numbers 2593, 2594, 2595, 2596, 2597, 2598, 2599, 8909, 8907, 8908);

(C) Personnel Report No. 25-05; and (D) Budget Voucher Adjustments. These items, forwarded to trustees for prior review, were prepared in accordance with state law, with vouchers available for public inspection at the Superintendent's office, per NRS 354.598005. The agenda allowed trustees or interested parties to pull items for separate consideration, ensuring transparency and flexibility.

President Wagstaff disclosed a conflict on voucher 259, listed for her reimbursement, and announced her intent to abstain, citing NRS 281A.420's ethical requirements. Trustees Dickerson and Jansen disclosed conflicts on voucher 2594, related to reimbursements for a School Board Association (SBA) trip, and also abstained. Trustee Burns disclosed a conflict on voucher 2594 due to being named in a lawsuit, similarly abstaining. These disclosures were made publicly and prior to voting.

Trustee Miller moved to approve the consent agenda, excluding items requiring abstentions, seconded by Trustee Gneiting. Public comment was opened, with one speaker commending the Board's transparency in disclosing conflicts, specifically thanking legal counsel Keith Ketola for guidance. No further comments were offered. The motion passed unanimously.

Separate motions addressed pulled items. Trustee Gneiting moved to approve voucher 259, seconded by Trustee Zinke. No public comment was given, and the motion passed 5-0-1, with Wagstaff abstaining as disclosed. Another motion by Gneiting, seconded by Zinke, approved the personnel report and special payment memo, with Dickerson and Jansen abstaining due to their conflicts. Public comment was absent, and the motion passed 4-0-3, reflecting the abstentions.

The Board's hearing of the 2025-2026 tentative budget and adoption of the final budget, commenced at 4:30 PM, as mandated by NRS 354.596. Director of Business Services Susan Estes presented the final budget, noting minimal changes from the April 17, 2025, tentative budget reviewed at the prior meeting. The sole adjustment was a proactive reduction in discretionary budgets aimed at cost savings. Estes emphasized the absence of a 1% contingency fund, a significant departure from prior years due to insufficient revenue, marking the first such omission in recent memory. She projected a reconciliation in December 2025, when actual enrollment and state funding allocations would be clarified, aligning with NRS 354.598005's requirement for balanced budgets.

Estes detailed the district's fiscal challenges, driven by declining enrollment of approximately 250 students annually, necessitating staffing adjustments. She estimated a potential loss of 10 staff positions based on a 22:1 student-teacher ratio if enrollment dropped by 220 students, underscoring the direct correlation between enrollment and funding. The state's per-pupil allocation, recently adjusted to \$10,622 from \$10,691, included a reduced supplemental allocation of \$109 per student, down from \$500, further straining resources. Estes highlighted the district's reliance on prior ending fund balances until 2022-2023, when declining enrollment "hit us," delaying necessary cuts. She advocated proactive staffing changes to align with enrollment, acknowledging missed opportunities two years prior.

Trustee Gneiting inquired about Administrative Regulation (AR) 603, which mandates a plan to restore the fund balance if it falls below 4%. Estes confirmed the district's efforts to comply, noting this was the first time in years the fund balance was an issue. She suggested a formal restoration plan might require consultation with the Nevada Department of Taxation and Department of

Education to avoid a compliance officer, a costly oversight measure. Trustee Zinke pressed on the timing of staffing reductions, noting the district was “held harmless” until 2022-2023, allowing reliance on prior balances. Estes acknowledged the oversight, admitting, “we probably should have done some major staffing changes then,” and stressed current proactive measures, including quarterly budget reviews to mitigate further declines.

Trustee Miller sought clarification on funding sources, distinguishing the general fund (per-pupil state allocations and local taxes) from capital improvement funds (residential building permit tax and GST revenue). Estes explained that capital funds, restricted to infrastructure, could not supplement the general fund, exacerbating budget constraints. She noted a \$600,000 general fund allocation for major maintenance, insufficient for district-wide needs, and a \$5.6 million transfer to special education, up from \$4 million, reflecting escalating costs. Trustee Zinke raised concerns about per-pupil spending, suggesting it exceeded state allocations, particularly at lake schools. Estes confirmed this discrepancy, noting rising costs outpaced funding, a statewide issue.

Public comment raised deep concern regarding the fiscal stability of the DCSD. Concerns were heard about a proposed \$10,000 per-student voucher for private or charter schools under Governor Lombardo’s administration, questioning its impact on public funding. Marty Swisher, a Gardnerville resident, praised Estes’ fiscal stewardship, recalling her oversight of a \$400,000 budget during his tenure. He warned of inevitable staff reductions due to fixed salary increases and declining enrollment, estimating over 80% of the budget was personnel-related. Swisher urged approval of the tentative budget, commending Superintendent Alvarado’s efforts to navigate a “hard market” and expressing hope for state funding relief.

Trustee Zinke expanded on enrollment declines, noting Douglas County’s aging demographic (average age 55 in the Ranchos) and high housing costs (median prices “extremely high”). He advocated for county collaboration to increase affordable housing, such as apartments or first-time buyer homes, to attract younger families and boost kindergarten enrollment. No further trustee discussion occurred, indicating focus on the motion. Trustee Jansen moved to adopt the final budget, seconded by Trustee Dickerson. Public comment was closed, and the motion passed unanimously.

Authors Note: President Wagstaff stated, “I’m pretty sure that she [Estes] understands budget like we don’t. We try. We attempt.” This is an outrageous and enlightening comment with the backdrop of potential staff layoffs which could impact as many as 10% of the DCSD staff and the potential for a compliance officer to be retained by the school district.

Agenda item 8 addressed an Open Meeting Law violation (A.G. File No. 13897-510) from December 12, 2023, involving Trustee Susan Jensen’s interruption of public commenter Leslie Hokanson. The Attorney General’s (AG) Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law determined Jensen’s actions restricted Hokanson’s speech based on viewpoint, violating NRS 241.035 and OML principles protecting public comment. The AG ordered the Board to acknowledge the violation at a public meeting, prompting this agenda item. Trustee Erinn Miller moved to acknowledge the findings, seconded by Trustee Markus Zinke.

Public comment reflected that of the public comment at the beginning of the meeting.

No trustee commentary followed public comment. The motion to acknowledge the AG's findings passed unanimously.

Principal Jason Reid of Pinion Hills Elementary School presented his report, detailing enrollment, academic performance, and community engagement. Reid reported a stable enrollment of approximately 258 students, consistent with the prior year, and a 70% proficiency in middle school English Language Arts (ELA), a standout metric county-wide. He outlined instructional initiatives, including vertical alignment to ensure consistent academic vocabulary and processes across grades (e.g., teaching five-paragraph essays uniformly from third to fifth grade). Reid highlighted math intervention programs, funded by board intervention grants, employing flexible models where teachers or interventionists work with varied student groups to enhance conceptual understanding. He noted significant growth in MAP and SBAC math scores in upper grades, attributing success to peer interactions and targeted interventions.

Reid emphasized community engagement, recognizing volunteers Steve and Leslie Reagan for their Safe Schools program, providing security oversight and interacting with students and staff. Tessa Cook, a grandparent volunteer, was praised for leading math games with incentives, dedicating two full days weekly across grade levels. PJ, a long-term volunteer, was lauded for managing the yearbook, teaching ceramics, and donating books purchased at yard sales, enhancing literacy. Reid's acknowledgment of these volunteers sought to underscore the integral need in fostering a "wildly positive, engaging, memorable experience" for students, aligning with the district's strategic goals.

Trustee Markus Zinke commended the 70% ELA proficiency, calling it "unreal across this county," and praised Reid's focus on core academics (math, English, reading) over extracurriculars. Zinke noted socioeconomic factors in Pinion Hills' success but emphasized Reid's leadership. No other trustee comments were given.

The HEART for Youth Program interagency agreement with Partnership Douglas County, a free referral service for student behavioral health assessments was approved by the Board. Deferred from April 17, 2025, pending additional information (provided post-meeting), the item had no fiscal impact. Trustee Knighting (likely Gneiting) moved to approve, seconded by Trustee Miller. No public comment was taken. The motion passed.

The Board approved the MOU with the Community Counseling Center (CCC) for in-school therapy, with no fiscal impact. Presenters Jackie and Executive Director Brown emphasized parental consent, discreet scheduling (avoiding core instruction), and 50-minute sessions in private rooms. The program, primarily at high schools, reduces absenteeism from off-campus therapy. Trustee Burns questioned parental notification. Trustee Dickerson clarified distinctions from HEART, noting CCC's therapy focus versus HEART's crisis referrals.

Public comment included Ronald Leeman, a parent, supporting the MOU's consent provisions, and Valerie Luchman, advocating for its benefits for traumatized students. Trustee Knighting moved to approve, seconded by Miller, passing unanimously.

Agenda items 14 and 15 involved first readings of Board Policy 808 (School Lunch) and AR 230 (Nevada Wellness Policy), presented by Nutrition Director Jordanna Foster and coordinator Melissa.

Policy 808 required only a 2024 state wellness policy link update. AR 230 mirrored state changes, banning carbonated flavored water and juices, recommending recess before lunch (two schools compliant, three split, two non-compliant), and removing a water ices prohibition. Foster noted exemptions for class parties and candy grams (e.g., Valentine's Day), managed via Google Docs to avoid competing with meal services.

Trustee Miller raised inconsistencies in off-campus policies for juniors and seniors, noting Douglas High's daily open campus versus Whittell's permission-based system. Foster deferred to her supervisor, but administrator Collin clarified Whittell's parental permission process, prompting a directive to align policies. Trustee Zeller (likely Miller) moved to update Policy 808 and AR 230, seconded by Jansen, passing unanimously.

Brandon Lewis and Wayne Carlson of the Nevada Public Agency Insurance Pool (NPAIP) presented the property and casualty insurance renewal through USI Insurance Services. Coverage included \$300 million for property (\$10,000 deductible), \$150 million for earthquake/flood (shared limit), \$10 million for liability, and \$2.5 million for sexual abuse claims. Cyber coverage introduced a \$25,000 deductible. Excess workers' compensation options were Safety National (\$72,258, A++15 rating) and Incline Casualty (\$50,962 one-year, \$49,434 two-year, A-8 rating). A state-required bond remained at \$6,430.

Carlson detailed NPAIP services, including \$18,000 network assessments (2018, 2023), \$8,000 emergency plans (2020, 2022), and grants (\$2,299 in 2020, \$22,460 in 2022). Training programs covered HR, cyber webinars, and 4,600 course completions. Lewis noted NPAIP's market negotiations, securing stable rates in a hard market. Trustee Miller questioned payroll-based premium adjustments, with Lewis confirming a 10% buffer (\$2.5 million) for refunds. Zinke inquired about vehicle fleet reductions, advised to update by year-end. Trustee Miller moved to approve the NPAIP package and Incline Casualty's two-year option, seconded by Jansen, passing unanimously.

Student Representative Olive Hamner-Jillson presented her student report, citing Whittell and Douglas High track successes (first and second places), AP testing completion, and senior events (prom on June 6). She thanked AP teachers (Shumshock, Lamb, Height, Kelly, Johnson, Nair, Pace) and Whittell visitors for support.

The Board heard trustee updates. Zinke described Franklin Covey training, track meets, and hiring observations, noting housing constraints. Wagstaff reported on explorations, trainings, and the Northern Nevada Student Farmers Market. Miller detailed track meets, talent shows, and expulsion hearings. Jansen attended commissioner meetings and the farmers market.

Frankie Alvarado gave his Superintendent's Report. He gave overview of administrative actions, strategic initiatives, and community engagement. The strategic plan was also addressed as part of his report.

The 2022 strategic plan was presented by Superintendent Frankie Alvarado and cabinet members Shannon Brown, Leslie Peters, Jeannie Dwyer, and Haley Sebahar. The plan, developed by former Superintendent Lewis, comprises four goals: (1) student success, opportunity, and access; (2) highly qualified personnel; (3) operations management; and (4) community engagement. Updates incorporated input from teachers, parents, administrators, students, and board observers, with

priorities set for teaching and learning frameworks, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and career and technical education (CTE).

Shannon Brown and Leslie Peters presented, noting the purchase of 6-12 ELA materials, delivered to schools, and the K-5 adoption process, with 22 team members reviewing four publishers. The textbook budget was doubled, enabling this work despite fiscal constraints. Brown recounted teacher Katie Shipley's excitement, likening material delivery to "Christmas in May." Materials included textbooks, novels, and seven-year digital licenses, selected by teachers during professional learning communities (PLCs). MTSS training at CC Meneley, Pau-Wa-Lu, and Aspire schools involved monthly sessions on behavior, literacy, and data-based decision-making, with plans for tier-two training at Meneley and Pau-Wa-Lu. Aspire would repeat tier-one due to staff turnover.

Trustee Zinke suggested integrating SBAC preparation into curricula, citing student unfamiliarity with test formats. Brown agreed, noting available resources but inconsistent application, and described a "rabbit hole" of claims and evidence analysis aligning common assessments with SBAC standards. Trustee Miller sought growth metrics, proposing third-grade proficiency as a predictor of success. Brown detailed the Read by Grade Three program, using MAP tests as screeners, with students below the 40th percentile receiving interventions tracked for six to eight weeks. Data is reported to the state in October, per Governor Lombardo's accountability measures. Zinke raised English learner (EL) challenges in math word problems, suggesting targeted vocabulary training. Brown highlighted district-wide "three reads" training for word problem access, with plans for further routines.

Jeannie Dwyer focused on recruitment and retention, reporting a 4% unfilled position rate, primarily in special education, with one hard-to-fill visually impaired teacher position contracted to a retiree. Partnerships with UNR and WNC aimed to address shortages, including a proposed school psychology program. A new CTE child development program at Whittell High School would allow students to manage a preschool, fostering future educators. Dwyer noted a posted work-based learning CTE position at Douglas High School to build community partnerships.

Trustee Zinke inquired about vetting long-term substitutes, critical given their impact on outcomes. Dwyer confirmed rigorous processes, including University of Utah training, prioritizing subs pursuing licensure, retired teachers, or exceptional candidates. New staff, including substitutes, undergo level-one and level-two training via the professional development center. Zinke suggested tracking retention rates historically, which Dwyer supported as a metric. Trustee Miller questioned PLC effectiveness, citing teacher skepticism. Dwyer acknowledged inconsistent PLC scheduling and proposed weekly data-focused sessions, aligning with Alvarado's later report.

Alvarado presented, emphasizing efficiency in "invisible" district office work. Key actions included administrator budget training, strategic plan-guided budgeting, and a full-time grants coordinator to supplement general fund revenues. The student activity manual, outdated for decades, would be updated collaboratively. Alvarado proposed aligning staff with enrollment, addressing payroll growth in a flat-funded environment, a shift from prior overstaffing.

Trustee Miller asked about inclusive education funding, noting increased special education enrollment. Alvarado confirmed grant pursuits and internal audits 45 days before pupil counts to

align with state reports. Trustee Zinke questioned IEP re-evaluations for new enrollees, with Alvarado noting services must mirror existing IEPs, with reviews by Dr. Mayfield and Ms. Kidman-Delany. Miller inquired about state funding, learning it was reduced, sharing \$1.5 million across districts exceeding 13% special education thresholds, yielding less than \$50,000 for DCSD.

Haley Sebahar introduced ParentSquare, replacing Remind, with features like volunteer sign-ups, multilingual settings, and event syncing. A family communication survey showed 70% felt included, 24% somewhat, and 4.6% not, with emergency alerts and school news prioritized. Sebahar proposed volunteer corners in newsletters, a digital welcome hub, and flyers in back-to-school packets. Trustee Miller suggested engagement metrics per school, targeting low-engagement sites like Pau-Wa-Lu. Zinke proposed involving PTOs and community groups (e.g., Rotary) in event planning, which Sebahar supported, pending IT security reviews.

Alvarado discussed administrative hires, addressing three vacancies. For Carson Valley Middle School (CVMS), he announced the appointment of a new principal, previously at Eagle Valley Middle School, with three years' experience in Carson. For Pau-Wa-Lu Middle School, Jen Worthington, an EPIC coach, was hired, praised for professional development support. The Aspire Academy process was ongoing, with interviews scheduled the following week. Alvarado detailed his input-seeking process, conducting student voice sessions to identify desired principal characteristics, staff meetings to assess school strengths, and parent meetings, though turnout was low.

Next, Alvarado addressed the Director of IT vacancy, meeting with the IT department to gather input on candidate qualities. He outlined a screening process involving tailored questions and applicant reviews, emphasizing technical expertise and alignment with district needs. This vacancy, critical for operational systems, underscored the district's reliance on robust IT infrastructure.

Alvarado highlighted his role in planning and attending the Franklin Covey training, involving all district administrators, office staff, and trustees. The training, focusing on four essential leadership roles (inspiring trust, creating vision, executing strategy, coaching potential), was facilitated by a "great" presenter. Alvarado proposed partnering with Franklin Covey for an "execution training" in late July or early August 2025, to develop wildly important goals (WIGs) at cabinet, leadership, and school levels. This initiative, inspired by the training's emphasis on shared decision-making, aimed to refine systems and foster collaboration across high school, middle school, and elementary levels.

Community engagement was a focal point, with Alvarado recounting his attendance at the Northern Nevada Student Farmers Market on May 15, 2025, alongside President Wagstaff, Dwyer, Peters, Brown, and Eberhardt. He purchased charm bracelets for his family and a snake from Minden Elementary, aligning with school colors. Alvarado thanked Pau-Wa-Lu and Scarselli students for their contributions.

Strategically, Alvarado outlined a "back to basics" approach for 2025-2026, focusing on system refinement for efficiency and effectiveness. The core responsibility, he emphasized, was teaching and learning opportunities. A key system targeted for improvement was professional learning communities (PLCs), led by Brown and Peters. Alvarado proposed professional development to calibrate PLC processes, allowing school leadership teams to identify needs. He referenced Trustee

Zinke's earlier PLC concerns, committing to weekly data-focused sessions to enhance teacher collaboration and student outcomes.

Alvarado discussed the CALL survey, conducted earlier in 2025 with WestEd, involving board collaboration. He tasked school leadership teams with reviewing survey data to identify one system for refinement, ensuring data-driven decisions. This process, integrated into WIG development, aimed to distribute leadership and solicit teacher and administrator voices. Alvarado emphasized shared decision-making, noting trustee participation in the Franklin Covey training as a model for inclusive governance.

Budget alignment was addressed, with Alvarado acknowledging Estes' efforts to navigate declining enrollment. He proposed creative cost-saving measures, including reassigning an assistant principal to support MTSS and EL programs, reducing strain on school psychologists. Alvarado noted the district's flat funding, with state allocations insufficient for rising special education costs, requiring general fund transfers. He committed to exploring grants and optimizing staff assignments to align with enrollment, a shift from prior overstaffing.

Alvarado concluded with donations, reporting a 2013 Chevrolet Sonic (\$2,000) to the DHS Auto Program and a \$3,000 donation to Minden Elementary for playground equipment. Enrollment was 4,893 students, up slightly from the prior month, offering a glimmer of stability. No public comment or action was taken, but Alvarado's report, spanning administrative, strategic, and community domains, underscored his leadership in a challenging landscape.

The final public comment period was held. Adrienne Sawyer opposed the Zoom-to-YouTube switch, citing Tahoe parent accessibility issues and contrasting \$1,600 savings with \$50,000 for training. Ronald Leeman praised DHS AP teachers. Shelly Speck echoed Zoom concerns and supported Alvarado's strategic plan. One resident compared AP and ACT testing. May Hyatt praised Pinion Hills and requested strong CVMS leadership. Casey Rogers defended Jensen, criticizing past mask mandates. Melinda Mayness and Blessing reiterated Zoom accessibility concerns. Wagstaff promised to explore comment options, acknowledging public concerns regarding the forum switch.

The DCSD meeting adjourned.