

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

September 12, 2025
Johnson City, Tennessee

The East Tennessee State University Board of Trustees met on Friday, September 12, 2025, at 1:15 p.m. in the East Tennessee Room of the D.P. Culp Student Center. The meeting was also live-streamed and recorded.

I. Call to Order

Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m. She began by highlighting some of the university's recent successes and achievements. Among them:

- ETSU welcomed the largest incoming first-year class in its history this semester, with more than 2,200 new students.
- Overall enrollment is up for the fall semester by more than 300 students.
- ETSU is experiencing record on-campus residency with more than 3,300 students now living in our residence halls.

Chair Steagall-Jones commended the university's staff, faculty, and students for their work in making these historic records possible. Chair Steagall-Jones congratulated Trustee Janet Ayers, recipient of the 2025 Dolly Parton Excellence in Leadership Award from Leadership Tennessee, for her work in opening doors for tens of thousands of rural Tennessee students to pursue higher education.

Chair Steagall-Jones then welcomed new members of the ETSU Board of Trustees: Jon Lundberg, Grant Summers, and Wade Farmer. She also congratulated Tony Treadway and Dorothy Grisham for being reappointed to the Board and welcomed new Student Trustee Aashi Vora.

II. Roll Call

Board Secretary Dr. Adam Green led the roll call.

Trustees physically present were:

Chair Melissa Steagall-Jones
Trustee Janet Ayers
Trustee Steve DeCarlo
Trustee Wade Farmer

Trustee Dr. Steph Frye-Clark
Trustee Dorothy Grisham
Trustee Jon Lundberg
Trustee Ron Ramsey
Trustee Grant Summers
Trustee Tony Treadway
Trustee Aashi Vora

Dr. Green informed the Board chair that a quorum was present.

III. Public Comments

No individuals were signed up to speak to the board during the public comment period.

IV. Approval of Minutes from May 23, 2025

The minutes from the May 23, 2025, meeting of the Board of Trustees were approved as submitted, with Trustee Dorothy Grisham making the motion to approve and Trustee Janet Ayers seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Report from the Academic, Research, and Student Success Committee

Trustee Janet Ayers reported that her committee took action on two items and heard four information items. The committee approved promotion and tenure upon appointment for Dr. Cristina Barroso. The committee also approved the Mission Profile for ETSU, with no changes from the previous version.

As an information item, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Kimberly McCorkle summarized academic notifications that took place from January 1, 2025, through July 31, 2025. Chair Ayers told the board that the committee heard a presentation by Dr. Bill Block, Vice President for Clinical Affairs and Dean of the Quillen College of Medicine. Dr. Block highlighted recent achievements by the college. Dr. Block also reported to the committee that Quillen exceeds \$3.2 million per year in uncompensated health care. Dr. Block announced to the committee that Quillen's entering class size will grow from 78 to 100 in the summer of 2026.

Chair Ayers reported that her committee heard an informational presentation on the work of the Center for Community Outreach and its impact on the state and region. Ms. Amy Edwards, the center's current Executive Director, summarized for the committee the various grants and contracts that the center administers and its statewide impact.

The final information item to come before the committee was an update on the university's new strategic enrollment management plan covering the period 2025 to 2030 presented by Dr. Joe Sherlin, Senior Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment, and Dr. Heather Levesque, Associate Vice President and Executive Director of Admissions,

Student Life, and Enrollment. The plan includes goals and strategies for first-year enrollment, transfer enrollment, undergraduate adult enrollment, and student success. The plan articulates a goal of reaching overall enrollment of 15,500 students by the year 2030.

VI. Report from the Finance and Administration Committee

Trustee Steve DeCarlo told the Board that his committee meeting consisted of information items only, with no action taken. The committee received a report from Dr. Karen King, Chief Information Officer, on the Voyager project, which went live with Oracle on July 1. The conversion was successful, and the defects that are being resolved are manageable. The Committee also heard a presentation by Ms. Christy Graham, Chief Financial Officer, on the unaudited year-end financial statements. The committee then received a report on agreements over \$250,000, including seven contracts and one RFQ that is in process.

VII. Report from the Audit Committee

Committee Chair Ron Ramsey reported that the committee approved two action items, which are on the consent agenda: the audit plan for FY26 and the Internal Audit employee profiles. The committee heard a report on audits and investigations performed from May through August 2025. An audit heat map was also reviewed. The committee then heard a report on the recommendation log status as of August 31, 2025, a report on audit functions for FY25, and a report on operating expenses for the Office of Internal Audit.

VIII. Consent Agenda

Chair Steagall-Jones then called the Board's attention to the Consent Agenda that included several routine items as well as items acted upon during the morning's committee meetings. Chair Steagall-Jones asked if there were any items on the Consent Agenda that need to be pulled for discussion and consideration by the full board. There were none. Trustee Jon Lundberg moved that the Consent Agenda be approved, and Trustee Tony Treadway seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

IX. Enrollment Update

Dr. Joe Sherlin, Senior Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment, reported to the Board that fall 2025 enrollment on the main campus has increased by 405 students, or just under 3 percent, compared to the fall of 2024. Dr. Sherlin said ETSU has been steadily rebuilding its undergraduate base. Over the last five fall semesters, 944 undergraduate students have been added. At the graduate level, ETSU experienced a slight decline for fall 2025, due largely to challenges in international enrollment and a reduction in positions funded by external grants. First-time freshmen increased in the fall

of 2025 by 7 percent, to 2,141, and the academic quality of the entering class has remained strong.

Dr. Sherlin told the Board that ETSU has now enrolled the three largest consecutive freshman classes in its history. The 2025 freshman class is our largest, with 2,284 students. Dr. Sherlin said significant growth has taken place in the number of out-of-state students enrolled, particularly from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, and in the number of students from metropolitan areas of Tennessee—Knoxville, Chattanooga, and Nashville. ETSU now enrolls students from all 50 states and over 60 countries.

Dr. Sherlin indicated that the number of students living on campus has grown by 90 percent since 2020 and that residence halls are at full capacity. He reviewed short-term strategies to address the demand: converting Yoakley back to a residence hall and forming partnerships with off-campus housing providers. Looking toward the long term, Dr. Sherlin said a plan to construct a new residence hall will come before the Board of Trustees this academic year.

Dr. Sherlin reported that ETSU's retention rate has risen since the pandemic, with the current rate of 76 percent being the second highest achieved in the past decade. Our goal is 85 percent. In addition, ETSU's six-year graduation rate has increased by 14 percent over the last eight years, placing us in the top quartile of growth for regional public universities nationwide.

Dr. Sherlin then reviewed success initiatives that are underway. The Mary V. Jordan Center opened this fall. This student success center will be staffed by a team of student success specialists focused on providing ongoing support to low-income and first-generation students. Next fall, the university's one stop shop, Buc Central, will open on the second floor of the Culp Center, to provide integrated support for financial aid, fee payment, and registration. Further, high-impact success practices are being incorporated into the university's general education courses.

In assessing the reasons for these successes, Dr. Sherlin pointed to investments in education made by the state of Tennessee and the fact that the state has had the foresight to trust these investments to local governance. The ETSU Board of Trustees, he said, has supported, collaborated with, and challenged ETSU's institutional leaders to be fully accountable to our mission.

Chair Steagall-Jones added her appreciation to Dr. Sherlin and his staff, whose work is critical to the success of the university.

X. Strategic Agenda Update and KPIs

Dr. Michael Hoff, Vice Provost for Decision Support and University Chief Planning Officer, reviewed for the Board the university's strategic framework and the pillars that support it. In looking at Enrollment and Graduation Rates, he pointed out that the four-

year graduation rate in 2025 is what the six-year graduation rate was in 2017, meaning that our students are graduating faster.

In the area of Access, Dr. Hoff reported that freshman applications for 2025 totaled 10,993, toward a 2030 goal of 12,000. Enrollment stands at 14,387, toward a 2030 goal of 15,500. In Student Success, Dr. Hoff noted that retention rate is now 75.5 percent, toward a 2030 goal of 85 percent, and that our graduation rate is 55.3 percent, toward a 2030 goal of 60 percent.

Under Institutional Impact, Dr. Hoff highlighted the fact that research and sponsored program activity now tops \$71 million, toward a 2030 goal of \$75 million. He called the board's attention to the university's research expenditures, which top \$50 million, pointing out that the reason for the increase in research and sponsored programs is the fact that ETSU is investing in these endeavors. ETSU Health patient visits, attendance at athletic events, and attendance at the Martin Center, Dr. Hoff added, are strong.

Under Operational Environment, Dr. Hoff highlighted the "Great Colleges to Work For" designation earned last year and added that ETSU should be poised to earn it again this year. Voluntary staff turnover has declined to 8.9 percent; and the university's Composite Financial Index is 4.58.

Dr. Hoff shared a table showing enrollment projections from 2014 through 2026, explaining that these numbers are vital in establishing ETSU's annual operating budgets. Dr. Hoff presented to the Board a list of activities that are part of our strategic agenda, noting that we have already accomplished most of the items for years one through five and quite a few of the expectations for years five through ten.

In discussing the table showing ETSU Prioritized Opportunities, Dr. Hoff said the important takeaway is that the institution is excelling at most all of the things the Board of Trustees has asked us to do and, at the same time, is excelling at most of the community's expectations.

Dr. Hoff presented the ETSU Planning Timeline, beginning with the year 2012, when the Committee for 125, Chapter 1, was created. In 2016, ETSU developed a strategic plan based on that document, and the next year, the Board of Trustees was established. The year 2021 saw the publication of the Committee for 125, Chapter 2, document. The next year, the board approved ETSU's strategic vision, extending to the year 2036. A new master plan was created in 2024. In 2025, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's new planning process began. This year also saw the development of ETSU's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan. Dr. Hoff added that the Board of Trustees was expanded to 12 members this year. In November, he said, the university will present to the Board an update to the 2036 strategic agenda.

XI. President's Report

Dr. Noland presented to the Board an overview of Access and Success, Strategic Initiatives, the work being done at ETSU within the context of the American higher education landscape, and work being done in Community Stewardship and Campus Engagement. He began by reviewing the original mission of East Tennessee State Normal School, as articulated by founding President Sidney G. Gilbreath: to improve the quality of life for the people of the region and beyond. Dr. Noland told the board that this mission has never changed.

After reviewing ETSU's strategic planning pillars, President Noland provided a statewide picture of higher education, especially for the benefit of the new members of the board. Except for the downturn associated with COVID-19, statewide higher education enrollment in Tennessee has remained relatively flat at a total of just over 222,000 students. Dr. Noland pointed out, however, that the distribution of that enrollment across institutions is not stagnant, with some institutions growing and some contracting. He added that the composition of that enrollment is also variable. At ETSU, for example, 60 percent of students receive Pell Grants; female students now make up 60 percent of the student body at ETSU; and, out-of-state student enrollment is now 22.1 percent, which is higher than most institutions in the state, primarily because of our location; and 80 percent of ETSU students are attending full-time.

Dr. Noland reviewed preliminary data for fall 2025 showing that ETSU's total enrollment stands at 14,387, for a 2.9 percent increase over fall 2024. He commended Dean Debbie Byrd and the faculty and staff in the Gatton College of Pharmacy for their 13 percent increase in enrollment, and he extended appreciation to members of the Board of Trustees for their support from an operating budget perspective, allowing us to lower tuition and fees within the College of Pharmacy.

Dr. Noland reviewed ETSU's retention figures which show a rate of 76 percent for 2025, against a goal of 85 percent. Our six-year cohort graduation rate for 2018-25, he said, is a record at 55 percent.

Dr. Noland then presented an overview of the higher education landscape nationwide. The Association of Governing Boards, he said, listed some of the top policy issues facing higher education, and they include accountability, judicial outcomes, and political action. *Inside Higher Education* cites the demographic cliff, changing markets for credentials, rising costs, and financial uncertainty. Deloitte's ranking includes cyber breaches, faculty and staff attrition, and changing public perceptions of higher education. President Noland said the takeaway from these surveys is the fact that there is much variability in the higher education marketplace.

In examining college-going rates in Tennessee, Dr. Noland told the Board that if the state's rate could go back to where it was before COVID, there would not be an enrollment challenge. In Tennessee, the college-going rate was 64.4 percent in 2015,

61.7 percent in 2019, and 56 percent for 2024. Dr. Noland called the Board's attention to college-going rates by gender, which will have long-term socioeconomic implications. Fewer than half of men in Tennessee are going on to post-secondary education. He added that surveys show college graduation is a higher priority for young teen women than young teen men. Describing the gender divide in terms of degree completion, President Noland noted that in 1995, the percentage of young men and women holding college degrees was somewhat parallel, but today, 47 percent of U.S. women ages 25 to 34 have a bachelor's degree, compared to only 37 percent of men. In light of these trends, he said, ETSU is putting into place initiatives focused on male recruitment and male success.

According to survey data, Dr. Noland said, most parents still want their children to go to college, and most want them to earn a baccalaureate degree. As far as the cost of higher education is concerned, Dr. Noland reported that 60 percent of Americans say it is worth the cost, but a significant number say it is not. Cost, he said, is one of the driving factors for people deciding not to attend college. He stressed that new data from the College Board show that when the cost of college is adjusted for inflation, Tennesseans are paying 11 percent less to go to college now than they were in 1994. That is true nationally as well. Dr. Noland said that when talk turns to the cost of attending college in Tennessee, most people use the figure of \$29,000 a year for public universities. He said tuition and fees at ETSU are approximately \$10,500. Within the \$29,000 figure are included housing, food, transportation, and personal needs. Dr. Noland noted, however, that those needs are there whether a person attends college or not, yet they get factored in when the government calculates college costs. He cited statistics from The Sycamore Institute of Tennessee showing that 97 percent of Tennesseans attending public colleges or universities in the state receive some form of scholarships or grants-in-aid. Approximately 70 percent of all Tennesseans qualify for the Lottery Scholarship. With these factors taken into account, the all-in average cost to attend a public university in Tennessee is around \$10,000.

Dr. Noland then summarized ETSU's progress in fulfilling its strategic initiatives. Within years one through five of the cycle, ETSU has accomplished most of the items on the list. The ones that remain relate primarily to construction. A significant number have also been accomplished for years five through ten of the cycle, with additional work needed on salary enhancements and in growing online offerings.

All of last year's strategic opportunities and initiatives, Dr. Noland announced, have been completed. They include:

- Strategic Enrollment Management and Recruitment Plan
- General Education Redesign
- Academic Restructuring
- Financial Aid Optimization
- Strategic Resources Alignment and Campus Budget Modeling

- Voyager Implementation
- Market Salary Enhancements
- Classification and Compensation Restructuring

Dr. Noland highlighted the strategic initiatives for 2025-26. They include:

- Adult degree completion and growing online education
- The Mary V. Jordan Student Success Center and its focus on first-generation, low-income students and intrusive advising
- Building out the academic portfolio, with emphasis on engineering
- P-20 and rural education enhancements

Dr. Noland thanked the Board for the focus it has placed on salary enhancements, noting that the largest salary increases in the history of ETSU were given this past year.

In his update on facilities, Dr. Noland said that Brown Hall renovation is well underway, and he thanked the members of the Tennessee General Assembly for their investments in both phases of the project. Burleson Hall renovations are complete, and work is continuing on laboratory and space enhancements at Valleybrook. The Bucky statue has been unveiled. Ground will be broken soon for the Student Life Greek Village, and staff will bring to the Board later this academic year plans for a new residence hall.

Reinforcing the fact that leadership by the Board of Trustees matters, Dr. Noland reviewed numbers from 2017, the first year of the Board's existence, and 2025. During that period, the number of first-time freshmen increased from 2,050 to 2,284. The retention rate improved from 73 percent to 76 percent. The graduation rate improved from 41 percent to 55 percent. The number of students living on campus jumped from 2,814 to 3,365. Sponsored awards increased from \$42.5 million to \$71.1 million. The Composite Financial Index went from 2.57 to 4.58. And ETSU's reserves moved from \$18.8 million to \$38 million.

Dr. Noland ended his presentation with a tribute to ETSU's veterans, and he announced that Col. Dan Bishop, Director of Military and Veterans Services, will soon be inducted into the National ROTC Hall of Fame. Dr. Noland praised Col. Bishop's successful efforts to save ETSU's Buccaneer Battalion when it was threatened, and he expressed his pride and gratitude that Col. Bishop, after deployment in Afghanistan and a stint at the Pentagon, decided to return to a leadership role on the ETSU campus.

XII. Other Business

There was no other business to come before the board.

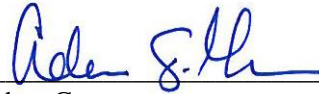
XIII. Executive Session

There was no need for an executive session.

XIV. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Green", is written over a horizontal line.

Adam Green
Secretary of the Board of Trustees

Approved by the Board of Trustees at its November 14, 2025 meeting.