

**Chamber Education Committee / Business Advisory Council Minutes
February 27, 2026**

Location Host: Stark State College Business and Entrepreneurial Center
6200 Frank Ave NW, North Canton, OH 44720

Attendance

Emil Alecusan	Rick Baxter	Barbara Bennett	Marty Bowe	Dawn Campanelli
Joseph Chaddock	Jeff Dafler	Lisa Dalpiaz	Chris DiLoreto	Shaun Eller
Sharla Elton	Brent Fatzinger	Matt Furguiele	Mike Hearn	Mary Ellen Icaza
Karen Jepsen	Gary Kandel	Jennifer Kessel	Eugene Lingenhoel	Dan Lowmiller
Brent May	Robert McBride	Jason Orin	Jim Reinhard	John Richard
John Rizzo	Tiffany Rogers	Michele Shaffer	Nathan Stutz	Dan Swisher
Jeffrey Talbert	Lisa Talbert	Larry Tausch	Christine Taylor	Geoff Wagner
Brett Yeagley	Megan Zimmerman	Dr. Para Jones	State Rep. Matt Kishman	State Rep. Jim Thomas.

1. Call to Order. Welcome and Approval of the Agenda and January Minutes

Dr. John Richard called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. John requested a motion to approve the January minutes. Marty Bowe made the motion, and Barb Bennett seconded, and upon being put to a vote, the motion carried.

2. Stark State College Welcome – Dr. Para Jones, President Stark State College

Dr. Para Jones welcomed everyone, mentioned the panel discussion, and invited attendees to tour the facilities if interested.

3. Legislative Panel Discussion – Moderated by John Rizzo, Vice President, Akron Canton Advocacy Alliance. State Representative Matt Kishman and State Representative Jim Thomas.

Jeff Dafler set the stage for the legislative dialog, and the importance of state representatives’ work in Columbus. Jeff introduced John Rizzo and State Representatives Matt Kishman and Jim Thomas. John Rizzo outlined the day’s agenda, focusing on the intersection of policy and education, and invited questions from attendees. John asked about the biggest challenges in Ohio education institutions. Representative Jim Thomas discussed the challenges of hiring bus drivers and the cost of higher education. Representative Matt Kishman emphasized the importance of preparing students for future jobs and the impact of AI on education. John inquired about the legislative process and the impact on education. Representative Thomas explained the process of passing property tax legislation and the importance of having relationships with school districts. Representative Kishman explained that the operating budget and the capital

budget need important feedback from the community. Both representatives discussed the challenges of funding education and the impact of property taxes issued on school districts. John raised the TechCred program, which provides employer-based skills training funding from the state of Ohio. John outlined the potential reforms to the program, including lowering the amount per training and requiring employers to contribute a portion of the cost. Representatives Thomas and Kishman discussed the success of the program and the need for more funding to sustain it as well as the importance of it for small businesses and the need for it to remain accessible. A discussion on Childcare and Workforce Development challenges was initiated by John and highlighted the importance of addressing childcare issues to support working parents and the workforce. Representative Kishman suggested making it easier to get a childcare facility license and allowing home daycare providers to care for more children. Representative Thomas mentioned the tri-share program and other initiatives that support the cause.

4. Stark State Presentation – Stark State College: College that works – Dr. Para Jones, President Stark State College

Dr. Para Jones provided an overview of Stark State College, its accreditation, and its partnerships with other institutions. Dr. Jones highlighted the BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) and the CDL program, which just received an \$875K award. Dr. Jones also highlighted the high demand programs in engineering technology, manufacturing, cyber and AI. Dr. Jones emphasized the affordability of Stark State College and the impact of scholarships and low tuition on student costs. Dr. Jones shared success stories of graduates and their impact on the community, and the partnerships with local employers and the importance of workforce development. Dr. Jones stated that Stark State College has been recognized by Harvard and Georgetown as a top community college. Attendees were invited to a tour to see the quality of the programs and facilities.

5. Adjourn & Tour of Stark State

John Richard requested a motion to adjourn at 1:04 p.m. Mike Hearn made the motion.