

NORTHWEST INDIANA SPECIAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE
2150 W. 97th PLACE
CROWN POINT, IN. 46307
August 19, 2026

Executive Session: The Board of Managers met in executive session at 5:30 p.m. and discussed items related to IC 5-14-1.5-6.1.

1. Mrs. Smith-Gomez called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
2. Mr. Bradley Keehn took roll call. The following members were recorded as present: Mrs. Smith-Gomez for Highland, Mr. Bradley Keehn for Hobart, Mrs. Tara Beilke for Hanover, Mrs. Louise Neese for Lake Ridge and Dr. Nathan Kleefisch for Tri-Creek. There was no representation for River Forest or Lake Station.
3. Mrs. Smith-Gomez asked for comments or questions on agenda items from the audience. There were none.
4. Mrs. Smith-Gomez asked for any additions or deletions to the July 8, 2026 minutes. Dr. Kleefisch moved for Board approval of the July 8, 2026 minutes, as presented. Mrs. Neese seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
5. Ms. Gilmore recommended Board approval of the monthly financial reports dated July 31, 2026. Mr. Keehn moved for Board approval of the monthly financial report dated July 31, 2026. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Beilke and passed unanimously.
6. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of Resolution #26-12: To Transfer Amounts from the Education Fund to the Operations Fund for July 2026. Dr. Kleefisch moved for Board approval of Resolution #26-12, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Neese and passed unanimously.
7. Dr. Harkema requested Board approval of the memo recommending a stipend for hourly employees who were out of work during the delayed start to the school year. Dr. Harkema said the hourly staff who work in Tri-Creek were not impacted so there is not a stipend recommended for them as they did not miss any days of work. Dr. Harkema then said the staff who work in Hanover missed 3 days of work and she is recommending a stipend to cover their hourly pay for 3 days of work. For all other hourly staff Dr. Harkema asked for a stipend to cover their hourly pay for 5 days of work. Dr. Harkema then mentioned at the bottom of the memo it is stated that all hourly employees have received pay for the amount of days outlined, if the Districts are required to make up any of the missed school days that these hourly employees have already been paid for, they will not receive additional compensation. Mrs. Neese moved for Board approval of the memo regarding a stipend for hourly employees, as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Kleefisch and passed unanimously.
8. Dr. Harkema provided the Board of Managers with the NISEC evaluation summary report for the 2025-2026 school year. Dr. Harkema shared 79 teachers were rated as highly effective, 58 teachers were rated as effective, 1 teacher received a rating of needs improvement and 0 teachers received a rating of ineffective.

9. Dr. Harkema requested Board approval of the professional leave activities sheet. Dr. Harkema said per Board Policy 6550, the information found within this sheet must be board approved annually. Dr. Kleefisch made the motion to approve the professional leave activities sheet, as presented. Mrs. Neese seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.
10. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of the memo regarding procurements for grant for sole providers. Ms. Gilmore explained this memo gets presented to the board annually for board approval in leu of going through the bidding process for contract services for speech. Ms. Gilmore said we have developed great relationships with the 5 contract companies we use to fill many of our Speech and Language Pathologist positions and we would like to continue using these 5 companies. Mr. Keehn moved for Board approval of the memo regarding procurements for grant for sole providers, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Beilke and passed unanimously.
11. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of the NISEC Health and Dental Insurance Premiums for the 2026-2027 school year. Ms. Gilmore explained the premiums are increasing by 6% this year. Mrs. Beilke moved for Board approval of the NISEC Health and Dental Insurance Premiums for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Kleefisch and passed unanimously.
12. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of the Eagle Park Fees for the 2026-2027 school year. Dr. Kleefisch asked if any of the fees went up for the 2026-2027 school year. Ms. Gilmore said the price for an extra lunch and breakfast was increased by a little for this year but it wasn't substantial. She mentioned Eagle Park School is still CEP eligible, all of the students receive free breakfast and lunch, they only have to pay for extras. Dr. Kleefisch moved for Board approval of the Eagle Park Fees for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Neese and passed unanimously.
13. Dr. Harkema requested Board approval of the Eagle Park Community School Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year. Dr. Harkema shared the updates to the handbook included a new welcome letter from Mrs. Fonner, internet access and cell phone policy. Mrs. Smith-Gomez made a comment to the public that the board cannot change the cell phone written by legislation. Dr. Kleefisch made the motion to approve the Eagle Park Community School Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Keehn and passed unanimously.
14. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of the Registered Staff Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year. Ms. Gilmore shared language regarding the dress code, background checks, health insurance open enrollment and mileage reimbursement was updated within the handbook. Ms. Gilmore said all titles formally called "Assistant Director" were swapped out with "HR Generalist" within the handbook as well. Mrs. Beilke made the motion to approve the Registered Staff Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Neese and passed unanimously.
15. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of the 10-12 Month Staff Handbook for the 2025-2026 school year. Ms. Gilmore shared language regarding health insurance open enrollment and mileage reimbursement was updated within the handbook. Ms. Gilmore said all titles formally called "Assistant Director" were swapped out with "HR Generalist" within the handbook as well. Dr. Kleefisch made the motion to approve the 10-12 Month Staff Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Neese and passed unanimously.

16. Dr. Harkema requested Board approval of the Teacher Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year. Dr. Harkema shared language regarding the dress code and mileage reimbursement was updated within the handbook. Dr. Harkema said within the handbook she updated the section regarding working condition and schedule and changed the language where it previously said “Employees are requested to provide a written letter of resignation at least 4 weeks prior to their last day of work” to now it says “Employees are requested to provide a written letter of resignation at least 2 weeks prior to their last day of work”. Mr. Keehn made the motion to approve the Teacher Handbook for the 2026-2027 school year, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Neese and passed unanimously.
17. Ms. Gilmore requested Board approval of the Administrative Benefits. Ms. Gilmore shared the updates to the administrative benefits document included the removal of the Assistant Director position and benefits as well as updating the language regarding the tax-sheltered annuity for all other administrators. Mrs. Neese made the motion to approve the Administrative Benefits, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Beilke and passed unanimously.
18. Dr. Harkema requested Board approval of the BLAST Fall Craft Show Fundraiser for Eagle Park Community School. Dr. Harkema said the craft show will be held on Wednesday September 23, 2026 and proceeds from the fundraiser will be used for future classroom activities and future work-task projects in BLAST. Mr. Keehn asked if there will be a flyer that can be shared out to spread the word. The other Board members shared their excitement for the craft show and said the BLAST students are always very creative and do great work. Dr. Kleefisch made the motion to approve the Eagle Park Community School Fall Craft Show Fundraiser, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Neese and passed unanimously.
19. Dr. Harkema requested Board approval of the second and final reading of the revised NEOLA Policy 9150. Dr. Kleefisch moved for Board approval of the second and final reading of the revised policy 9150, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Keehn and passed unanimously.
20. **Personnel:**
Dr. Harkema recommended approval to the following personnel actions:
 - A. Retirement**
None at this time.
 - B. Retirement**
None at this time.
 - C. Resignations**
 - Administrative
Kristine Besch, District Director in Highland, effective August 17, 2026.
 - Certified
Jody Brown, Mild Interventions Teacher at Hanover High School, effective August 10, 2026.
Andrea Celestin, Educational Diagnostician with NISEC, effective August 10, 2026. Never started, was offered District Director position.
Anne Ciastko, Mild Interventions Teacher at Highland Middle School, effective July 24, 2026.
Michaelene Goodrich-Hanley, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher with NISEC, effective July 23, 2026.
Kendra Hawkins, Mild Interventions Teacher at Red Cedars Elementary, effective July 10, 2026.
Elizabeth Johnston, Mild Interventions Teacher at Lowell Intermediate School, effective July 28, 2026.
Antoinette Mario, School Psychologist with ARENA Program, effective July 27, 2026.
Travis Molina, Mild Interventions Teacher at Lowell Middle School, effective July 30, 2026.

Gianna Polacek, Educational Diagnostician with NISEC, effective August 31, 2026.
Denona Pryor, Mild Interventions Teacher at Calumet High School, effective July 28, 2026.
Amanda Spoolstra, Mild Interventions Teacher at Southridge Elementary School, effective July 30, 2026.

Classified

Madeline Cruz, Paraprofessional at TELC at George Earle, effective July 10, 2026.
Eugene Engels, Paraprofessional at River Forest High School, effective July 31, 2026.
Sophia Galetti, Intense Interventions Tech at Three Creeks Elementary, effective July 29, 2026.
Sonia Garcia, Paraprofessional at Southridge Elementary School, effective August 4, 2026.
Helena Gutierrez, Paraprofessional at Joan Martin Elementary School, effective July 27, 2026.
Melanie Haberlin, Paraprofessional at Red Cedars Elementary School, effective July 14, 2026.
Lillian Hampton, Paraprofessional at River Forest Middle School, effective August 09, 2026. Moved into a teaching position.
Esther Lopez, Virtual Speech E-Helper in Lake Ridge, effective July 6, 2026.
Jasmine Miller, Paraprofessional at Evans Elementary School, effective July 11, 2026.
Sandy Talavera, Paraprofessional at Johnston Elementary School, effective July 15, 2026.
Nicole Tamayo, Paraprofessional at Joan Martin Elementary School, effective August 3, 2026.
Brandi Thornton, Paraprofessional at Veterans Elementary School, effective August 7, 2026.
Esmerelda Villagomez, Paraprofessional at Highland High School, effective August 10, 2026. Moved into a teaching position.

Non-Certified Clerical

Kimberly Wegrzyn, District Secretary with NISEC, effective August 5, 2026.

Registered

Jennifer Barrera, Behavior Support Specialist at Eagle Park Community School, effective July 29, 2026.
Summer Baxter, Behavior Support Specialist at Eagle Park Community School, effective August 5, 2026.
Mark Myers, Behavior Support Specialist at Bailey Elementary School, effective August 10, 2026. Moved into a teaching position.

C. Terminations

None at this time.

D. Appointments

Administrative

Andrea Celestin, District Director in Highland, effective August 11, 2026.

Certified

Jeremy Andras, Mild Interventions/SEL Teacher at Hanover Middle School, effective August 11, 2026.
Veronica Castanon, Mild Interventions/SEL Teacher at Hobart Middle School, effective August 10, 2026.
Lillian Hampton, Mild Interventions Teacher at Hobart Middle School, effective August 10, 2026.
Dejon Harris, Mild Interventions/SEL Teacher at Edison Jr./Sr. High School, effective August 6, 2026.
William Head, Mild Interventions Teacher at Calumet High School, effective August 4, 2026.
Scott Iczkowski, Mild Interventions Teacher split between Johnston Elementary and Southridge Elementary, effective August 11, 2026.
Melissa Jewett, Mild Interventions Teacher at Calumet High School, effective August 4, 2026.
Toree Mahler, Mild Interventions Teacher at Bailey Elementary School, effective August 6, 2026.
Ann Marie Matovina, Life Skills Teacher at Calumet High School, effective August 4, 2026.
Vicki McLean, Mild Interventions Teacher at Hanover High School, effective August 17, 2026.
Mark Myers, Mild Interventions/SEL Teacher at Bailey Elementary School, effective August 10, 2026.
Jessica Palfi, Mild Interventions Teacher at Lowell Middle School, effective August 12, 2026.
Madelyn Strothoff, Mild Interventions/Autism Teacher at Bailey Elementary School, effective August 10, 2026.
Esmerelda Villagomez, Mild Interventions Teacher at Highland High School, effective August 11, 2026.

Roxanne Zendejas, Mild Interventions Teacher at Highland Middle School, effective August 11, 2026.

Classified

Kari Borucki, Paraprofessional at Oak Hill Elementary School, effective August 18, 2026.

Taylor Brening, Paraprofessional at Three Creeks Elementary School, effective August 18, 2026.

Alandria Brown, Paraprofessional at Johnston Elementary School, effective August 13, 2026.

Anjel Brown, Paraprofessional at Joan Martin Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Delia Ceja, Paraprofessional at Evans Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Elizabeth Coe, Paraprofessional at Hobart Middle School, effective August 12, 2026.

Heather Cope-Lyle, Paraprofessional at Red Cedars Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Amber Downing, Paraprofessional at Highland Middle School, effective August 13, 2026.

Rebecca Ercus, Paraprofessional at Lowell Middle School, effective August 18, 2026.

Mars Estrellas, Paraprofessional at Edison Jr./Sr. High School, effective August 12, 2026.

Emily Franklin, Paraprofessional at Longfellow Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Anna Gonzales, Paraprofessional at Oak Hill Elementary School, effective August 18, 2026.

Jamie Jamnik, Paraprofessional at Red Cedars Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Tiffany Kennedy, Paraprofessional at Liberty Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Nicole Lindgren, Paraprofessional at Highland Middle School, effective August 13, 2026.

Meagan Loving, Paraprofessional at Evans Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Demi Machuca, Paraprofessional at Highland High School, effective August 13, 2026.

Milton McKnight, Paraprofessional at River Forest Middle School, effective August 12, 2026.

Diamond Moore, Paraprofessional at Southridge Elementary School, effective August 13, 2026.

Riley Mummey-Wilson, Paraprofessional at Joan Martin Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Cheryl Phillips, Paraprofessional at Lowell Middle School, effective August 18, 2026.

Jessica Recia, Paraprofessional at Longfellow Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Kate Regnier, Paraprofessional at TELC at George Earle, effective August 12, 2026.

Linda Ringenberg, Paraprofessional at Hanover Middle School, effective August 12, 2026.

Stephanie Roberts, Paraprofessional at Evans Elementary School, effective August 10, 2026.

Kayla Stewart, Paraprofessional at Joan Martin Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Jaylene Valdivia, Paraprofessional at Joan Martin Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Felicity Vaught, Paraprofessional at Eagle Park Community School, effective August 12, 2026.

Wendy Spencer, Paraprofessional at Evans Elementary School, effective August 12, 2026.

Alivia Pinon, Paraprofessional at Highland Middle School, effective August 13, 2026.

Registered

Alexis Bozinovich, Behavior Support Specialist at Eagle Park Community School, effective August 10, 2026.

Kristen Finkiewicz, Part-Time Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant in River Forest, effective August 10, 2026.

Skylar Petho, Behavior Intervention Specialist at Eagle Park Community School, effective August 25, 2026.

Emily Ray, Behavior Support Specialist split between Eagle Park Community School and Edison Jr./Sr. High School, effective August 10, 2026.

E. Independent Contracts

None at this time.

F. Leave of Absence

Sharon Autterson, leave of absence from September 14, 2026 – September 18, 2026, 4 days of PTO and 1 day unpaid for a total of 5 days off.

Debra Fazekas, FMLA leave from August 10, 2026 through September 22, 2026 per the memo from Christine Hazard, HR Generalist, dated August 19, 2026.

Schuyler Lopez, medical leave from October 22, 2026 through January 4, 2027 per the memo from Christine Hazard, HR Generalist, dated August 19, 2026.

Kelly Peters, FMLA leave from August 11, 2026 through September 27, 2026 per the memo from Christine Hazard, HR Generalist, dated August 19, 2026.

Brian Richter, FMLA leave from August 10, 2026 through August 28, 2026 per the memo from Christine Hazard, HR Generalist, dated August 19, 2026.

Julie Whitney, FMLA leave from September 2, 2026 through September 24, 2026 per the memo from Christine Hazard, HR Generalist, dated August 19, 2026.

G. Conference Leave

None at this time.

H. Other

Vida Choucalas, Long Term Teacher of Record Substitute for the 2026-2027 school year, effective August 12, 2026.

Toni Cuellar, Substitute Teacher at Evans Elementary School, effective June 1, 2026. End of Contract.

Candi Dines-Cress, Long Term Teacher of Record Substitute for the 2026-2027 school year, effective August 12, 2026.

Mellisa Schlitz, Change of position from a Mild Interventions/ECD Teacher at Evans Elementary School to a Long-term Substitute Teacher at Evans Elementary School, effective August 10, 2026.

Kelsey Shaw, Change of position from Part-Time Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant to Full-Time Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant in Hanover and Eagle Park, effective August 1, 2026.

Mrs. Smith-Gomez welcomed Andrea Celestin to the Administrative team as a District Director in Highland. Dr. Kleefisch moved for Board approval of the Personnel Report, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Beilke and passed unanimously.

21. **Director's Report:**

- Dr. Harkema shared the events of the first two weeks of August, including CPI Training, New Teacher Training and Paraprofessional Training. Dr. Harkema said she sent out a survey after para training asking for feedback and said she received a lot of positive feedback on the new structure of para training. Dr. Harkema said the training was split into 2 smaller groups this year and based on the feedback of the survey, it was well liked amongst the group.
- Dr. Harkema updated the Board of Managers on the annual New Administrator's training for all new building administrators and guidance counselors who may participate in special education conferences. This training was originally scheduled for August 20, 2026 but has been rescheduled for September 3, 2026.
- Dr. Harkema shared the updated NISEC organizational charts with the hiring of the new District Director for Highland.
- Dr. Harkema updated the Board of Managers on NISEC's recruitment efforts. Dr. Harkema said everyone has worked very hard to fill positions at NISEC, there have been in District hiring events, held open interviews at the Lake County Library, attended the job fair in Merrillville. Dr. Harkema shared NISEC currently has 98% of the teacher positions filled and 92% of the para positions filled.
- Dr. Harkema shared the new location for the ARENA testing program for NISEC is at Lincoln Elementary within the Hanover School District.
- Dr. Harkema shared information on support at Eagle Park School for the upcoming school year. Dr. Harkema said there will be an advanced CPI trainer onsite at Eagle Park each day of the week.
- Dr. Harkema updated the Board of Managers on the current Eagle Park closure due to the severe weather that occurred on August 11, 2026 in Lake County, Indiana. Dr. Harkema shared the students and staff of Eagle Park have not returned yet and she is currently working with the seven Districts. Dr. Harkema said once everyone is able to return she will be working with Mrs. Fonner to make sure missed services are made up.

22. Mrs. Beilke asked for comments or questions from the Board.
The Board Members thanked everyone for their hard work. Dr. Harkema mentioned NISEC hosted an event to provide food to staff during these difficult times.
23. Mrs. Beilke asked for comments or questions from the Audience.
There were none.
24. Dr. Kleefisch moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Beilke and passed unanimously.