



Minutes

Centers for Applied Science and Technology
Board of Trustees Meeting | April 16, 2026 | 4 pm - 5:30 pm
Advanced Learning Academy - Primary
1014 Waverly Avenue, San Antonio, TX 78201

Board Members Present: Rene Dominguez, Georgina Podjenski, Erik Ford, Jeanne Russell, and Katie Chain

Board Member Present (Virtually): Dr. Lyssa Ochoa and Leslie Cantu

Board Member Absent: Erik Nieves

Staff Present: Jen Maestas, Heriberto Rodriguez, Al Perez, Amanda Sierra, Kailey Lopez, and Stephanie Gaitan

1. **Welcome:** Advanced Learning Academy 2nd and 3rd grade students, along with educators Jennifer Rabat and Heather Westerfield, shared their Project Based Learning experience centered around the driving question: "How can we create a museum to teach science?" Students from kindergarten through 3rd grade explored a variety of museums — including the Witte Museum, the San Antonio Museum of Art, and the DoSeum — to understand how exhibits are designed, why visitors are drawn to certain museums, and how institutions communicate ideas to the public. Throughout the project, students were organized into teams of three, each assigned a specific role. They pitched their ideas, iterated on their concepts, and received multiple rounds of feedback along the way. The experience culminated in a community exhibit at the San Antonio Botanical Gardens, where students showcased their work to the public. Reflecting on the experience, students highlighted key takeaways: the value of teamwork and collaboration, a deeper understanding of science concepts, and the ability to communicate ideas effectively and receive constructive feedback.
2. **Data:** Jeanne Russell introduced the board to the network's newest member, Kailey Lopez. This is a new role, and Lopez will lead the network's recruiting and enrollment efforts. Russell also provided the board with an enrollment update and current projections for the 2026–2027 school year.
3. **Consent Agenda**
 - a. Approve Minutes | February 19, 2026 Board Meeting: Rene Dominguez moved to approve the February 19, 2026 meeting minutes. Georgina Podjenski seconded the motion; the motion passed unanimously.
4. **Board Shoutouts |** Jeanne and Heriberto Rodriguez thanked the board for their additional support since our previous meeting:
 - a. Leslie Cantu and TX Fame - Promoting TX FAME at Youth Rally
 - b. Lisa Lewis and Sylvia Zamarripa at CPS Energy - Military Speed Mentoring Event
 - c. Rene Dominguez, Georgina Podjenski, Leslie Canut and Lisa Lewis for Celebrating Jeanne at the SA Report Education Forum
 - d. Katie Chain and H-E-B | CAST Lead Greenhouse Grant
 - e. Congrats to Leslie Cantu and Toyotetsu - 20th Anniversary
 - f. Georgina Podjenski and Katie Chain - H-E-B High School Internships

Russell also shared highlights from across the CAST Network, including:

- SparkEd Educator Event
- Hallie Gellabert representing CAST Schools at TPR's Education Week event
- The St. Mary's University and CAST Teach partnership
- CAST School's SXSW EDU presentation
- Publicity surrounding CAST Tech's Second Chance Thrift Store
- The network's first-ever H-E-B Excellence in Education Finalist, Oscar Garcia Roman of CAST Med High School

5. **Board action items:** Jeanne Russell asked the board to:
 - a. Contribute to the nonprofit's College Assistance Program (CAP). Donations provide students with supplemental funding to cover college-related expenses not traditionally supported by financial aid. Amanda Sierra noted that achieving 100% board member participation in giving strengthens grant applications with external funders, who frequently inquire about board contribution rates. Heriberto Rodriguez will share a recap of current board member donations.

- b. Members agreed to represent the board at campus graduations:
 - i. Advanced Learning Academy | Monday, June 1 | 1 PM - Erik Ford
 - ii. CAST Lead | Wednesday, May 27 | 9 AM - Katie Chain
 - iii. CAST Med | Monday, June 1 | 4 PM - Dr. Lyssa Ochoa and Georgina Podjenski
 - iv. CAST STEM | Friday, May 15 | 7 PM - Leslie Cantu
 - v. CAST Tech | Monday, June 1 | 6:30 PM- Lisa Lewis

6. Career-Connected Learning: Heriberto Rodriguez...

- a. Provided the board with an update on the partnership with Restore Education. Through the nonprofit's Career Bridge program, CAST Schools is partnering with Restore Education to host a bootcamp for seniors who have indicated plans to enter the workforce after graduation. The bootcamp will offer students the opportunity to earn industry-recognized certifications in Health and Finance.
- b. Facilitated a discussion on establishing anchor partners for each campus. Anchor partners would support campuses by offering a range of career-connected learning opportunities and work-based experiences, such as internships and practicums. Dr. Lyssa Ochoa recommended pursuing University Health System as a potential anchor partner for CAST Med. Rene Dominguez shared that he would invite CAST Schools to present at the State of Innovation event in October. Heriberto Rodriguez will send the board our current menu of offerings listing how industry can partner with CAST Schools.

7. Strategic Direction: Jen Maestas provided the board with an update on the network's strategic direction, including the introduction of new competencies, the strategic planning process, staffing updates, key external factors affecting the nonprofit, and current organizational priorities.

8. Upcoming Events:

- a. Jeanne Ruseel shared upcoming events to include Black Student Union Career Day on May 1, 2026, the final Student Advisory meeting at Phil Hardberger Park on May 8, 2026.
- b. Jen Maestas shared that we would need to reschedule our final meeting for the school year. After polling the board, the board meeting will be moved to May 28. At this meeting, the board will review and vote to approve the 2026-2027 budget.

9. Executive Session: The board will convene in Closed Session to review and approve updated financials and receive an update on CAST Med & Imagine. (Board Chair Dr. Lyssa Ochoa had to leave early)

10. Adjourn; The board adjourned and will reconvene on May 28 at 4 p.m. the CAST Network offices on 200 Basse Rd., with a Zoom option.