



EXPLORE@RC

The Lab School at Roanoke College

Explore@RC Governing Board Meeting Minutes

Date: January 22, 2026

Time: 3:00 – 4:30 pm

Location: Kime Room, The Colket Center, Roanoke College

In-person attendees included Natasha Watts, Jennifer Dean, Becca Goldstein, Heather Johnson, Christina Rose, Mike Riley, Sally Southard, Lisa Stoneman, Karin Carneal, Cheryl Hopson, April Woodward and Debbie Carpenter. In attendance virtually (via Microsoft Teams) was Gary Skeen and Kathy Wolfe. Absent members were Curtis Hicks, Karen Sanzo and Kimble Reynolds.

Natasha Watts (Director, Explore@RC) opened the meeting, noting it was their largest gathering to date and expressing excitement and appreciation about the strong turnout.

Natasha introduced herself and shared her background in youth media, arts, computer science, community college work, and engineering education.

Board members and attendees introduced themselves, including:

- Lisa Stoneman – Assistant VP for RCRV
- Christina Rose – Coordinator of Student Services, Salem City
- Jennifer Dean – Deputy Superintendent, Salem City Schools
- Mike Riley – Executive Director of Secondary, Roanoke County Schools
- Debbie Carpenter – Administrative Coordinator, RCRV
- Sally Southard – Former Board Chair; Roanoke College alumna
- April Woodward – VP of Oncology, Lewis Gale; Roanoke College alumna
- Cheryl Hopson – Associate Professor of English; Roanoke College alumna
- Karen Carneal – Assistant Professor of Education; Roanoke College alumna
- Becca Goldstein – Student Success Coordinator, Explore@RC
- Kathy Wolfe (virtual) – VP for Academic Affairs, Roanoke College
- Gary Skeen (virtual) – Associate Director, AU Center for Educational Innovation and Opportunity

Natasha Watts opened her presentation with enrollment data. Current enrollment is: 38 students, which is up from 24 last Fall. The goal is to have 70 students enrolled next academic year. Dr. Watts attributed in part to the new Law Caucus program led by Steve Capaldo.

It was reported that 100% of students earned a C or better in Fall 2026 classes for the Explore@RC students and 24 students collectively earned 158 college credit hours. The program is offering ongoing midterm assessments to identify tutoring and intervention needs.

Dr. Watts shared student work and engagement highlights including student presentations for a biology research project on Kentucky bluegrass growth responses to music stimuli. Additionally, two returning students were highlighted for their academic excellence and participation in campus events.

The Virginia Secretary of Education, Aimee Guidera, recently visit Roanoke College for the purpose of observing the Explore@RC Lab School and this even resulted in positive press coverage.

Program expansion and initiatives such as the Law Caucus, career exploration courses and SAT prep opportunities were discussed. Dr. Watts explained that the Law Caucus has had a strong turnout regionally and we are exploring options for remote participation statewide. Career exploration courses are being designed to connect students with workforce professionals and expand experiential learning. Becca Goldstein completed certification to provide SAT preparation for students which has been a resource that has been requested.

A Middle School Day Academy is scheduled for March 26–27, 2026. It is a free event for 8th graders featuring immersive, hands-on learning sessions.

Additionally, three Summer 2026 Academies are planned and include a documentary film studies camp, a STEAM camp (biology + humanities) and a week-long residential law camp led by Steve Capaldo.

A budget and finance overview was presented by Heather Johnson and Debbie Carpenter:

- Explore@RC received \$1.7M in planning and startup funds.
- The total lab school grant spans multiple phases, totaling ~\$3.57M.
- Renovations in Fintel Library and Morehead Hall are major capital expenditures for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.
- Delays due to state procurement regulations required a grant extension to June 30, 2026.
- Nine grant proposals were submitted this year totaling \$444,000 to support and demonstrate Roanoke College's sustainability efforts
 - \$25,000 awarded and \$314,000 pending.
 - A significant \$274,000 congressional earmark is moving through final approval.

Lisa Stoneman discussed the plans of RC-RV for academic pathway development. The first area discussed was the Associate of Arts in College Foundations. The degree was submitted to SACS on January 1, 2026. It will provide students who start in 10th grade with a pathway to graduate with an associate degree. It is designed to complement existing regional college offerings without duplicating programs. The next path is an Applied Bachelor's Degrees that is under development. The 90-credit degree in Public Administration will be offered fully online.

The driving need of today's meeting was to review and adopt the Bylaws, and it was determined that 6 of the 8 voting members were present in-person, therefore, a quorum was present. Roanoke College's legal counsel completed their review on the document presented to the group. The following edits discussed included:

- Formatting corrections (missing Section 7, Article 2 placement).
- Audit requirements clarification (whether Explore@RC requires separate audit or falls under college audit).
- Clarification of Executive Director evaluation process.
- Clarification on officer appointment process (Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer)

Sally Southard made a motion to approve the bylaws with suggested revisions made, and Cheryl Hopson seconded the motion. No additional discussion was raised and the motion passed unanimously with a quorum present. Voting members included Cheryl Hopson, Karin Carneal, Jennifer Dean, Mike Riley, Sally Southard and April Woodward. Natasha Watts will send final revised bylaws by email.

Dr. Watts discussed open Board positions for a community member and a business leader. The group suggested checking with Jonathan Lee for suggestions due to his community and business connections via the Salem Chamber of Commerce and Wayne Atkins with the City of Salem.

Becca and Natasha will continue identifying candidates for parent and student representative seats.

The following announcements were made:

- Cheryl Hopson will give a Black History Month talk for homeschooled high school students (details to follow).
- ODU's Innovative Education Summit will be held March 23–24; registration is free.

The next meeting date will be in April 2026. It was discussed that an afternoon meeting is preferred due to the availability of campus parking.