

DCA Board of Directors Meeting Minutes June 25, 2025

Date and Location

Wednesday June 25th, 2025

11:30 AM

6067 Decatur Blvd, Indianapolis, IN 46241

Board Members Present

Monique Johnson

Brittney Kalmas

Allyson Strother

Joey Wright

Bernice Garcia

Julie Pitts

Others Present (Staff, Public)

Aimee Brown, DCA, School Leader

Julie Fenton, Director of Student Services

Cora Collier, Instruction and Accountability Director

Octavius Molton, CFO Damar Services

Katie McCoy, Chief Executive Associate

Kristen Blake, Chief Executive Assistant

Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 11:30 AM.

A quorum was present, and minutes from the April 2025 meeting were approved, motioned by Brittney Kalmas and seconded by Bernice Garcia.

Curriculum and Programming

Due to recent legislation (IC 20-32-8.5-2), public schools in Indiana with an IREAD-3 passing rate below 70% are now required to follow several new mandates. These schools must implement a reading curriculum that is grounded in the Science of Reading and approved by the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). They are also required to employ an instructional coach trained in the Science of Reading, administer the IREAD-3 assessment to second-grade students, and use an IDOE-approved assessment that aligns with Indiana Academic Standards. To meet these requirements, DCA has purchased McGraw Hill's *Open Court* reading curriculum, which meets the Science of Reading standards and will be implemented during the 2025–2026 school year.

Additionally, Senate Enrolled Act 1 (SEA 1), passed in 2024, mandates that schools offer summer school to certain students based on their IREAD-3 performance. This includes second-grade students who score "At Risk" and third-grade students who score "Did Not Pass." Schools that fall below the 70% passing threshold are also required to hire a literacy coach trained in

the Science of Reading, which includes components such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. At DCA, Cora Collier has completed the necessary training and is in the process of obtaining certification by passing the PRAXIS exam. Over the summer, Joy Patterson, DCA's elementary teacher, led a summer school program under the guidance of Cora Collier. Of the four students who were required to attend, only one participated. As a result, mandatory reading intervention plans will be developed and implemented for the remaining three students in the 2025–2026 school year.

The graduating class of 2029, which includes this year's incoming freshmen, will be the first group required to follow Indiana's updated diploma guidelines. The new "base" Indiana Diploma replaces the previous Core 40 and offers students more flexibility to personalize their high school experience. Students may also earn Honors or Honors Plus seals by completing advanced requirements in one or more of three areas: Enrollment, Employment, or Enlistment and Service. The Alternate Diploma option remains available for students who meet specific qualifications.

DCA continues to utilize a range of instructional resources, including:

- Into Math/Reading (elementary)
- Imagine Learning (high school diploma-track)
- Life-Centered Education (vocational high school)
- Unique Learning System (life skills)
- Moby Max and Learning A-Z (elementary)
- Google Classroom (various levels)
- Community-Based Instruction (CBI)
- Onsite Job Skills training

To help ease the paraprofessional shortage, the US Department of Education has approved the Indiana Department of Education's request to allow LEAs who meet the requirements to utilize the more flexible state defined paraprofessional requirements for highly qualified rather than the current federal requirements. Damar Charter Academy has applied for the Ed-Flex waiver. These requirements apply to all instructional paraprofessionals regardless of how they are funded due to DCA being a Title-I Schoolwide program.

DCA is seeking the paraprofessional to be determined to be highly qualified if he or she has:

- Two years of college experience
- A two-year college degree
- Passed the Para-Pro Assessment (within the first year of employment)
- One year or 1,000 hours of previous employment experience in a school or working with children
- Completed LEA required professional development modules/training

Stakeholders had the opportunity to comment during the school's June Board Meeting. A link to an online survey <https://forms.office.com/r/XxuuvjZacu> where feedback could be provided was emailed to all parents/guardians prior to the Annual Title I Meeting and Back-To-School Night. Comments will be recorded via the Microsoft Form's responses and/or as part of the Board Meeting minutes, which are made available to the public on the school's website. No comments have been made at this time.

School Safety

Over the past year, the School Safety Committee met regularly to review both existing and proposed safety protocols and procedures. A revised safety plan was developed and shared with the committee for feedback. After discussing potential changes, a final version of the plan will be completed in time for the start of the new school year. All staff will receive training on the updated procedures from DCA's School Resource Officer during the back-to-school professional development days to ensure proper implementation.

Leadership and Personnel

Currently, all personnel are expected to return in the fall, and all openings are currently filled.

Grants and Fundraising

As DCA moves toward closing out another grant cycle, the administration continues to work closely with Damar Services to ensure all application, expenditure, and reimbursement deadlines are met. DCA has received several grants, including Title I, Title II, Title IV, and IDEA 611 and 619. These grants are designated for specific areas of improvement and must be used for supplemental activities and resources beyond regular operational expenses. The funding has supported the enhancement of DCA's program offerings, provided professional development opportunities for staff, and helped fund the Social-Emotional Learning Specialist position.

Governance

DCA received \$50,000 and \$250,000 through Phases 1 and 2 of the Lilly Endowment Grant to support vocational program and enrollment growth. After meeting with Lilly representatives, who encouraged alignment with the Freeway model and inclusion of health services, DCA chose to withdraw from the original grant and will instead apply for a separate grant, which could provide up to \$9 million.

Due to space limitations, DCA is exploring three potential expansion sites in the community, with plans to add a school-based health clinic. Leadership is considering whether to relocate the entire school or open an additional campus.

Damar has also presented expansion opportunities in Richmond and other parts of Indiana. To pursue these, DCA would need to seek a new authorizer outside the Mayor's Office but aims to maintain a positive relationship after recently securing a 15-year charter renewal.

The board held two votes related to these plans. First, it approved authorizing DCA leadership to continue working with the state board to explore new authorizers for potential expansion, with **Julie Pitts making the motion and Bernice Garcia seconding**. Second, the board approved allowing leadership to continue evaluating new site options within Marion County, with **Allyson Strothers making the motion and Brittney Kalmas seconding**.

Finance

Members were presented with the proposed budget, which reflects that DCA's expenses have remained relatively consistent. However, the Charter School Facilities Grant will not be funded for the 2026 fiscal year, resulting in a projected net loss for DCA. In response, the administration is exploring options to reduce costs in other areas.

The budget was approved following a motion by Allyson and a second by Monique.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:40 PM, motioned by Brittney Kalmas and seconded by Allyson Stothers.