

Mount Pleasant, IA – March 28, 2023 — Iowa Wesleyan University’s Board of Trustees unanimously voted today to close the university at the end of this academic year. The decision is based on a combination of financial challenges – increased operating costs due to inflationary pressures, changing enrollment trends, a significant drop in philanthropic giving, and the rejection of a proposal for federal Covid funding by Governor Reynolds.

This decision follows an intensive analysis of Iowa Wesleyan’s financial operations and considerable exploration of all feasible strategic alternatives. The vote to close comes as the university has been experiencing unprecedented enrollment growth, improvements in student retention, and success with efforts to address economic and workforce development challenges throughout Southeast Iowa, including the formation of a unique partnership with Southeastern Community College. While the university’s overall enrollment has increased post-pandemic, it is still not yet at a threshold needed for financial stability.

“It is with deep sadness that we announce the Board of Trustees has made the heartbreaking decision to close our beloved Iowa Wesleyan after 181 years as an educational pillar in this community,” said Christine Plunkett, president of Iowa Wesleyan University. “Our focus is now on assuring our over 850 students have a smooth transition to another educational opportunity.”

Iowa Wesleyan has secured four teach-out agreements with William Penn University, Upper Iowa University, University of Dubuque, and Culver-Stockton College so students can complete their degrees. The teach-out plans ensure the students can complete their program on time and for a comparable cost to Iowa Wesleyan. Additional teach-out agreements may be added.

“We know our action will be felt deeply by all Iowa Wesleyan University faculty, staff, students, families, alumni, donors, Mount Pleasant, and the entire region of Southeast Iowa,” said Robert Miller, chairman of the Board of Trustees. “Like many colleges and universities nationally that have recently announced closure, IW has been confronted with many headwinds including increasing operating costs, declining numbers of high school graduates nationally and insurmountable inflationary pressures. We have worked tirelessly to find solutions at all levels but to no avail.”

Iowa Wesleyan submitted a proposal for money from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that were provided to the state of Iowa. As a primary employer in Southeast Iowa that provided a wide range of educational, economic, workforce, social, and cultural opportunities, Iowa Wesleyan requested \$12 million from Governor Kim Reynolds aligned with her Empower Rural Iowa Initiative.

“As a higher education institution that serves rural Iowa, we are disappointed in the lack of state support for this effort. All our indicators have been trending in a positive direction, but we needed funding to buy some additional time,” says Miller. “We are just heartbroken.”

When the university closes on May 31, the physical campus will become the responsibility of the United States Department of Agriculture.

Iowa Wesleyan University will host a media briefing via zoom today, March 28, at 2:00 pm (central time). IW Board Chairman Bob Miller and President Chris Plunkett will be in attendance. No media questions will be answered before this virtual briefing. Media interested in attending can email marketing@iw.edu to receive the zoom link.