LYME-OLD LYME SCHOOLS

Regional School District #18

A Private School Experience *in a Public School Setting*

Regular Board of Education Meeting
May 7, 2025

Board Present: Jason Kemp, Chair; Anna James, Vice Chair; Christopher Staab, Treasurer; Martha Shoemaker, Secretary; Laura Dean-Frazier; Susan Fogliano; Gavin Lodge; Alexander Lowry

Administration Present: Ian Neviaser, Superintendent of Schools; Mark Ambruso, Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School; Michelle Dean, Director of Curriculum; Melissa Dougherty, Director of Special Services; Kelly Enoch, Principal of Mile Creek School; Allison Hine, Principal of Lyme Consolidated School; Sean Kennedy, Assistant Principal of Mile Creek School; Holly McCalla, Business Manager; Jeanne Manfredi, Assistant Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme High School; Ron Turner, Director of Facilities & Technology; Noah Ventola, Assistant Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School; James Wygonik, Principal of Lyme-Old Lyme High School

Others Present: Music Department Staff Members: Sarah Evans, Kristine Pekar, Melissa Rostkoski, Laura Ventres, Jacob Wilson; Chloe Datum and Ada LaConti, High School Student Representatives; 12 community members from LOL

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Jason Kemp. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. Consent Agenda

1. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Staab made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Lodge, to approve the minutes of Regular Meeting and Executive Session of April 2, 2025; District Budget Hearing of April 7, 2025; and Special Meeting of April 10, 2025.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

III. Visitors

1. CABE Student Leadership Award

CABE invites its member Boards to recognize outstanding student leaders at the middle and high school levels. The principals of each school are asked to facilitate the selection of the students based on a given set of criteria. Jim Wygonik, Principal of LOLHS, and Mark Ambruso, Principal of LOLMS, recognized the award winners for this year's CABE Student Leadership Award:
Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School: Victoria Glaras and Tristan Reyes
Lyme-Old Lyme High School: Caeli Edmed and Ryan Shapiro

2. Report from Student Representatives

Chloe Datum and Ada LaConti reported on the following activities taking place at the schools:
At LOLHS: Students are busy preparing for the end of the school year. In April, the student council sponsored their annual "Where's Wygo" event, where students have to search for different cutouts of the "Where's Waldo" character with different teachers' faces on them, earning a prize if they find one with Mr. Wygonik. It was a hit once again and really brought students together. Juniors interested in the medical field had the opportunity to visit Middlesex Health Shoreline Center for Medical Career Day to learn more about healthcare professions. All of the language honor societies, as well as the National Honor Society, inducted their new members. Congratulations to all who were inducted. Both band and chorus hosted their spring concerts. Finishing off the month strong, students attended the junior/senior prom at Haley Mansion in Mystic, which was a huge success. Spring sports are continuing with shoreline and state competitions approaching quickly, and AP tests began this week and will continue into next week.

At Mile Creek School and Lyme Consolidated School: At both elementary schools, students in third, fourth and fifth have begun their State Assessments. By the end of May, students will have taken an ELA assessment as well as two math tests. Additionally, fifth graders will complete the NGSS assessment. Both schools enjoyed musicals that were performed for the entire student body and also for the families of the fifth graders. At Lyme School, the students performed "Phantom of the Music Room" and at Mile Creek School, they performed "Frozen."

We continue to work with the Middle School to ensure that the fifth grade students are set up for success as they transition to LOLMS next fall. Mr. Ambruso visited the classes last week with some current sixth grade students, and LYSB offered an evening program entitled "Gearing up for Middle School" that provided an opportunity to explore various scenarios and topics together as a family. Soon, the fifth graders will visit the Middle School for a tour and another opportunity to learn more and ask questions.

At Lyme School, Curiosity Shop is in full swing with more than 170 students participating in the many weekly offerings. A few weeks ago, many families gathered at Lyme School for a celebration of the arts where student artwork was on display, students created artwork, and we all enjoyed pizza and a marionette show together. We are deeply appreciative of the work the PTO has done to make both of these enriching events happen.

At Mile Creek School, the Student Leaders shared the work they have done to create habitats for the bluebird population on school grounds during the Earth Day assembly, and fourth grade students and teachers pitched in to clean up the courtyard. Many thanks to the PTO for all of the special events they have planned for this week's Staff Appreciation Week.

In the Preschool Program: April was an exciting month at Center School. We took our monthly walking field trip to the Phoebe Griffin Noyes Library to check out books, and we had so much fun dressing up as pirates for Pirate Day. We enjoyed two visits from our middle school book buddies, and we recognized Earth Day by reading *I am Earth*, which teaches about the planet Earth and how people can keep Earth healthy. In May, we are looking forward to learning about dinosaurs and fossils. We will read *I am a Dinosaur*, *I am a T-Rex* and *I am a Triceratops* along with other books about dinosaurs, and we will learn about the difference between carnivores and herbivores. We will finish the alphabet by learning the letter Z and, during math instruction, we will learn about the ABC pattern. The color of the month is brown, the shape is a hexagon and Georgia O'Keefe is the artist of the month.

3. Public Comment

Emily Bjornberg, a former resident of Lyme, addressed the Board to share personal experiences of racism and classism endured by her two children who recently graduated from LOLMS and LOLHS. She recounted an incident in which her middle school-aged child was encouraged by peers to use a racial slur. When the parent raised this with administrators, she claims she was met with denial and inaction. Mrs. Bjornberg expressed regret for previously staying silent and emphasized the emotional and systemic harm caused by such inaction. She noted that she planned to continue speaking at future Board meetings, including about an incident involving Hartford Public High School. Mrs. Bjornberg ended with a recommendation to the Board to begin taking real action to address racism, classism and elitism in the district, asserting that students deserve more than silence. Her statement is attached to these minutes for informational purposes.

Michael Hansen, an Old Lyme resident, expressed concern about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, referencing a previous Board meeting where there was a presentation on its use in the classroom. While acknowledging AI's capabilities, particularly in technical fields like coding and network configuration, he cautioned against uncritical adoption due to lack of proven benefits, environmental impact, and potential cognitive consequences. Mr. Hansen warned that overreliance on AI can hinder learning and create dependency, leaving individuals unprepared when AI tools are unavailable. He urged the Board to proceed cautiously and consider implementing a formal policy on AI use in schools.

IV. Correspondence

Mr. Kemp reviewed a summary of the correspondence that the Board received over the last month. The correspondence is attached to the minutes for informational purposes. *The opinions expressed in the attached correspondence are solely those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the position of the Regional School District #18 Board of Education or its employees.*

Sender	Date	Subject
Doug and Stephanie McAdams	April 10, 2025	Support for the music program and keeping it intact.
Mary Powell St. Louis	May 2, 2025	Consideration of the use of a portion of the reserve funds to dampen the impact of debt service on the budget in the next five years.

V. Administrative Reports

1. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Neviaser reviewed the May personnel report which reflected the following:

Vacancies 2024-2025	
Instructional Assistants	All Levels
School Nurse Supervisor with School Nurse Duties	Districtwide
Custodians	Districtwide
Vacancies 2025-2026	
Special Education Teacher	Mile Creek School (.5 FTE)
Science Teacher	LOLHS
Special Education Teacher (long-term substitute position)	LOLHS

Appointments			
Name	**Position**	**Location**	**Effective Date**
Thomas Bushnell	Assistant Principal	LOLHS	July 1, 2025
Ariana Spearin	4th Grade Teacher	TBD	August 22, 2025
Erin Breitenbach	4th Grade Teacher	TBD	August 22, 2025

Retirements			
Name	**Position**	**Location**	**Effective Date**
Jeanne Manfredi	Assistant Principal	LOLHS	June 30, 2025
Rebecca Bocian	Preschool Teacher	Center School	June 30, 2025
Marianne DeBruyn	Special Education Teacher	Mile Creek School	June 30, 2025
Susan Whritner	5th Grade Teacher	Mile Creek School	June 30, 2025
Thelma Halloran	Art Teacher	Center School	June 30, 2025
Bruce Hrozenchik	5th Grade Teacher	Lyme School	June 30, 2025
Jeanne DeLaura	Administrative Asst.	Central Office	August 31, 2025

Resignations			
Name	**Position**	**Location**	**Effective Date**
Jason Matthewson	Instructional Assistant	LOLHS	May 5, 2025

Mr. Neviaser reviewed the May enrollment report which reflected a total of 1,276 students in-house, an increase of one student from last month this time.

Mr. Neviaser gave an update on the progress towards the district goals.

Curriculum
Utilize Panorama to track and monitor progress across all domains in order to make informed decisions about individual student programming.
Presentation under Educational Presentation.

Human Resources
In alignment with state guidelines, implement the newly created Region 18 Educator Support Plan and gather feedback on the process to inform any plan revisions for year two.
PDEC reviewed survey results and created two subcommittees which will develop a single point rubric and the other will make recommended changes to the paperwork to streamline the process.

Community
In order to streamline communication to our students and families, evaluate school and district processes to determine the most efficient and effective methods of disseminating information.
Goal complete per the Communications Committee.

Facilities
In preparation for construction to begin, develop strategies to minimize classroom disruption, adhere to the approved budget and design, and continue to maintain existing facilities via the five-year plan.
All GMP's are complete. Construction continues at all schools with little to no interruption to learning. Summer plans for relocation of programs (ESY) have been solidified.

Sustainability
Maintain and expand "Green Teams" at each building to identify, address, and support student, staff and community-driven sustainability initiatives.

Center School: Recognized Earth Day by taking clean-up walks and planted bulbs and flowers in one of the courtyards. Audubon Society will be visiting Center School to teach about how birds build nests. Students will continue with their good handwashing edict by not leaving the water on, using less soap and counting to three when dispensing paper towels, and we will continue to practice recycling habits in our classrooms.

LOLMS: Took a field trip to Griswold Point during low tide to meet wetlands scientist and learn about piping plover protection and note erosion due to rising sea levels. Planned and prepared for Earth Day and Arbor Day by meeting with the Old Lyme Tree Commission to plant donated saplings and prepare them to donate to the students, faculty and staff at LOLMS. Had guest speakers -Alexander Amendola – Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection who is the forester in charge of the projects in Nehantic State Forest, Old Lyme Tree Commission Members Joanne DiCamilla (chair) and member Pete Edmondson.

Mile Creek School: Completed their project to provide houses for the bluebirds on school property and are continuing with the TREX initiative. Some members of the team are currently researching the steps that would be necessary to bring composting to Mile Creek.

LOLHS: Volunteering at the Mystic Half Marathon and 10K. Planning to clean out and replant raised beds around LOLHS. Students, who are also day camp counselors for parks and recreation, agreed to maintain these beds throughout the summer until August.

Lyme School: Green Team created a video about composting that was presented to an audience of educators around the State in a Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection webinar. They also created Earth Day posters for display at the Lyme Grange Hall.

Board of Education
Attend professional development opportunities offered through CABE including the CABE/CAPSS Convention and other statewide board of education activities.
No new updates.

2. Business Manager's Report
Mrs. McCalla reviewed the Executive Budget Summary as of April 30, 2025. Fluctuations of note: as previously reported, Special Education overage is based upon student need and stipulated financial obligations. Support Services is over budget due to contract for nursing services to cover for an extended medical leave. Administrative Services overage is mainly due to the builder's risk insurance policies for the four-school project that the Board approved at December's meeting. Even with these overages, the total percent spending to budget is exactly the same percent to budget as last year for the same time period.

	2024-2025 Received YTD
Town of Old Lyme	$23,568,675
Town of Lyme	$5,317,086

Mrs. McCalla reviewed the Contingency Maintenance Report. There is an increase of $15,765 due to an inspection and repair of the gymnasium bleachers at both LOLHS and LOLMS as well as labor and materials to replace the leaking OS&Y Gate Valve within the fire suppression sprinkler system. Balance stands at $106,565.

VI. Educational Presentation

1. Panorama Update

Michelle Dean, Director of Curriculum, gave an update on the Panorama program entitled "Panorama: Transforming School Data Management." A copy of her presentation is attached to these minutes for informational purposes.

Follow-up discussion centered on the following subjects: how this program was selected; usage by other school districts; transfer of student data from another school district; usefulness for parents; ability to create student and/or group (grade) reports; cost inclusion; communication component as students move from one grade to the next and one school to the next/transition meetings; parent access limitations; improvements as a safety net to identify students who need support; potential to ease work of admin/teachers; responsiveness of customer support; and caution over customization of program.

VII. Chairman & Committee Reports:

a. *Facilities*. No report.
b. *Finance*. No report.
c. *Communications*. No report.
d. *Policy*. No report.
e. *LEARN*. Dr. Brown reported that they are meeting on May 8. Dr. Brown also reported that he has a visual of the restructuring of the LEARN magnet schools. He will distribute at the next meeting.
f. *LOL Prevention Coalition*. No report.
g. *PreK-8 Building Committee*. Mrs. Fogliano gave the following report:

Construction at all four schools continues to move forward. Mile Creek School, in particular, has some very visible changes. There has been a fair amount of tree removal on the premises in preparation for new parking, traffic flow and the new addition. Once the project is near completion, trees will be replanted in excess of what was removed, as well as additional lighting and landscaping on the site.

At the rear of the Mile Creek School property, where it joins with the town little league field, a decision was made to surround the drainage pond there with a six-foot chain link fence. This will not detract from the pond's function, but will assure less access for the safety of children in the rare event the pond is full. Benesch Engineering, who designed the drainage system, is working with the site contractor presently to ensure that all of the pre-fabricated concrete drainage materials comply with their design.

Steel will go up for the addition at Mile Creek School starting on May 6.

All five of our schools, including the high school, will be impacted as Downes Construction shuts down the heating systems for summer, starting on May 2 at LOLMS and Lyme School, and later after the 15 of the month at Mile Creek School. These systems must be shut down and drained to allow for the boiler rooms to be renovated at all the buildings in time for the opening of school in August. The high school

will be impacted as the middle school boilers service them as well. Parents and staff have been notified, as per the messages you have seen from the Superintendent.

The new generator for Mile Creek School will be delivered earlier than expected. Ultimately, the old generator will be trucked across town and used at the middle school as a cost savings measure for our facilities budget.

As one might expect, the redesign of the fire suppression systems at Mile Creek School in particular have caused some delays in the existing building completion. Downes is currently working on a strategy to get us back on track over the summer, hopefully avoiding additional costs.

There will be one agenda item for the Board's approval on May 7, related to approval of a change order for Mile Creek School.

One last note: As the impact of tariffs, interest rates and other economic conditions become clearer, be assured that the Building Committee and the District Administration are carefully watching the bottom line. Fortunately, many of the project materials have been ordered and, in some cases, delivered and being stored by subcontractors. We will, of course, keep you informed.

Mr. Staab asked for the status of boilers being removed and whether they could be cashed in for scrap metal. Mrs. Fogliano will investigate this and report back to the Board. Mr. Neviaser noted that he believed this was included in the cost of the haulers taking the metal away.

Mr. Neviaser updated the Board on how the construction company makes up for any lost time due to unforeseen circumstances, which is built into the planning process.

Mrs. Fogliano reported that Thomas Keel resigned from the PK-8 Building Committee, and alternate Darren Favello has replaced him as a member on the committee. They are now looking for an alternate to replace Mr. Favello.

VIII. New Business

1. Approval of PK-8 Building Committee Recommendation

MOTION: Mr. Staab made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. Shoemaker, to approve Potential Change Order #4 to transfer from an allowance to the subcontractor line item.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

2. Approval of LOLHS Auditorium Sound Project

Ron Turner, Director of Facilities and Technology, provided the following background information on this agenda item:

The District issued an open public bid to solicit proposals from qualified firms for the upgrade of the outdated sound system at Lyme-Old Lyme High School. This project will involve replacing the current hardware, speakers and microphones with state-of-the-art technology, enabling the District to support professional-level productions in the multi-use auditorium. The District received one proposal: Sound Stage Productions, Inc. — $150,000.00

The bid was thoroughly evaluated, and references were checked. Sound Stage Productions has a proven track record of successful projects within the District, including the auditorium lighting upgrade at the High School, the auditorium sound system at the Middle School, the auditorium and sound system in the Mile Creek cafeteria, and the sound system in the Mile Creek gymnasium.

This project is part of the District's five-year facilities plan, and the total project cost is accounted for in the 2025-2026 fiscal year budget.

MOTION: Mrs. Shoemaker made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. James, to award the contract to Sound Stage Productions Inc., for the upgrade of the Lyme-Old Lyme High School auditorium sound system in the amount of $150,000.

Mr. Staab suggested taking the $150,000 out of the undesignated fund allowing for more monies returned to the towns. Mr. Neviaser explained that this is a decision that does not have to be made immediately and will be added to another agenda for further consideration in the October timeframe.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

3. Approval of LOLMS Auditorium Lighting Project
Ron Turner gave the following background information on this agenda item:

The District conducted a public bid process to solicit proposals from qualified firms for upgrading the theatrical lighting system at Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School. The project involves replacing the current conventional lighting fixtures with energy-efficient LED technology, enhancing the District's ability to support professional-level productions in the multi-use theater space. The upgrade will also reduce heat output, decrease electricity usage, and eliminate the need for frequent bulb replacements.
The District received one proposal from: Sound Stage Productions, Inc. for $162,990.

Following a thorough evaluation of the bid and the completion of reference checks, Sound Stage Productions has been found to have successfully completed several projects within the District. Notable past projects include the auditorium lighting upgrade at the High School, the auditorium sound system at the Middle School, the sound and lighting systems in the Mile Creek cafeteria, and the sound system in the Mile Creek gymnasium.

This lighting upgrade is part of the District's five-year facilities plan and is accounted for in the 2025-2026 fiscal year budget.

MOTION: Mrs. Fogliano made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. Dean-Frazier, to award the contract to Sound Stage Productions Inc., for the upgrade of the Lyme-Old Lyme Middle School theater lighting system in the amount of $162,990.

Again, Mr. Staab suggested taking the $162,990 out of the undesignated fund allowing for more monies returned to the towns. Mr. Neviaser explained that this is a decision that does not have to be made immediately and will be added to another agenda for further consideration in the October timeframe.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

IX. Old Business

1. Approval of AP Biology Textbook

This textbook was presented for review to the Board of Ed at their April meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Staab made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Lowry, to approve the AP Biology textbook as presented.

VOTE: the Board voted unanimously in favor of the motion.

2. Music Department Update

Mr. Neviaser reported that the administrative team and the music department staff have been meeting weekly after the Board approved six full-time music teachers in the 2025-2026 budget with the caveat that the Board hold further discussion at the May meeting on the feasibility of what can and cannot be done on the proposed expansion of the music program and the need for continued collaboration between the music department and administration to ensure the success of the proposed initiatives.

Mr. Neviaser reviewed a PowerPoint presentation developed by the staff of the music department which detailed staffing adjustments over the five buildings to best utilize the 6.0 FTE teachers that make up this department. It included the initial proposal from the April 10 meeting, a revised staffing proposal for 2025-2026, and the proposals not implemented.

The following is the breakdown of staff and their building assignment for the 2025-2026 school year:
Melissa Rostkoski: PK-5 General Music, 3-5 Choir, 4-5 Instrumental (LC and CS)

Matthew Guevara: 1-5 General Music, 3rd Grade Choir, 4-5 Instrumental (MC)

Laura Ventres: 5-8 Choir, 6-8 Choral DS Lessons (MC and MS)

Sarah Evans: 4th Grade Instrumental, 6-8 Instrumental and DS Lessons (MC and MS)

Jacob Wilson III: 9-12 Instrumental and Electives, 7-8 Music IMPACT (HS and MS)

Kristine Pekar: K General Music, 4th Grade Choir, 9-12 Choir and Electives (HS and MC)

Follow-up discussed centered on the following subjects: STEM classification for music theory; reasoning behind not moving forward with unified voices proposal; request for an update on how this is working once 2025-2026 school year is underway; instruction time losses from an education standpoint (science and social studies times at Mile Creek); the program changes impacting overall education of students; importance of keepings math and ELA sacred; and added benefits of music instruction.

Mr. Neviaser commended the administrative team and the music department staff for the tremendous efforts by all to make this work.

X. Executive Session

Mr. Lodge made a motion, which was seconded by Mrs. James, to move into executive session for the purpose of discussing the superintendent's end of year review. Mr. Neviaser was invited to attend the executive session.

XI. Adjournment

The regular meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m. upon a motion by Mr. Lodge and a second by Mrs. James.

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Shoemaker, Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to address the board once again about Racism in the Lyme Old Lyme School system.

At your last BOE meeting, I wanted you to understand directly from a student perspective that unchecked racism, classism and elitism have been doing damage to our school system since at least the 1990's.

Tonight, I will discuss the much more recent experiences of my children, both of whom graduated in 2024, one from LOLHS and one from LOLMS. Both struggled with far worse classism and racism than I experienced.

Unfortunately, I do not have time tonight to go through every single instance of racism that I attempted to flag for the administrators at the LOL Middle School. So instead, I will focus on one instance in particular. Although I could give you many examples, I do think this one is the most poignant.

Almost exactly a year ago, I reached out to the principal and vice principal of the Lyme Old Lyme Middle School. We had discussed racism many times before. I had raised issues about the stunning lack of priority placed on cultural competency already. But I was shocked and dismayed when my child came home and told me that her friends were encouraging her to use the word "nigger" because they believed it to be funny.

Now, peer pressure in middle school is fierce and can come in many forms. I understand that some of it is unavoidable. Perhaps we do not have the tools to stop peer pressure from doing damage. However, we can and should provide guard rails to our children about what is appropriate and not appropriate in terms of how they engage with not just the Old Lyme community, but the wider world.

When I brought up the use of the word "nigger" to the Lyme Old Lyme Middle School principal, his reaction was predictable. He told me I had no proof and I was making a heck of an accusation. Sound familiar?

I disagreed with his assessment of course. After some discussion, he told me that he is actually unable to address the use of the word "nigger" with his students because it could be considered "political" and therefore not suited to be discussed in our school system. He told me that he was FOLLOWING THE POLICY OF THIS BOARD OF EDUCATION by refusing to address the use of the word.

To be even clearer: he blamed each and every one of you for his inability to address his own students on the use of a word that is abhorrent.

I submit to you that his reaction would have been different if we were discussing almost any other inappropriate language, including several four letter words we all know. But, since this was a racial epithet, he claimed complete powerlessness to even address his own students.

I was told that LOL school systems were following their own policy by refusing to discuss racial slurs. And once again, just like what I told you about the LOL Schools in the 1990's, I was bullied into silence. The issue was buried. I was told that I was the one who was wrong. The school system again moved on without any meaningful discussion.

And although I was frustrated by the entire situation, I stayed quiet. I told myself I had done my best by raising the issue and it was not my fault that it fell on deaf ears. I told myself that I had done what I could. And I was wrong.

Never did I think that my silence would hurt people I cared about. Never did I believe I would have to physically sit through the consequences of my own inaction in real time. I truly believed a year ago that my silence hurt me and me alone. And I was wrong.

At the next Board of Education meeting, I plan to discuss with you the events that unfolded in the Lyme Old Lyme High School Gym in early March when our basketball team played Hartford Public High School. I will address this board at least three more times.

I thank you, again, for this opportunity. I sincerely hope that you are starting to understand that racism, classism and elitism have been given the environment to THRIVE here in Old Lyme, and that has ongoing consequences for our own students, our families and our reputation.

I hope that, by the end of my discussions in October, you will agree to take some form of action that will help our administrators to finally address this successfully. Our children deserve more than silence - and they have for a very long time. Thank you.

Emily Anne Bjornberg

The opinions expressed in the attached correspondence are solely those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the position of the Regional School District #18 Board of Education or its employees.

Delaura, Jeanne

From: Stephanie McAdams <stephanie.mcadams@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 10, 2025 1:37 PM
To: Delaura, Jeanne; Dean-Frazier, Laura (BOE); mfoglianos@region18.org; James, Anna (BOE); Kemp, Jason (BOE); Lodge, Gavin (BOE); Lowry, Alexander (BOE); Shoemaker, Martha (BOE); Staab, Christopher (BOE)
Cc: Doug Cell
Subject: Support for our excellent music program

Dear Region 18 Board of Education members,

We are writing to ask for your support in keeping our excellent music department strong and intact. Please do not cut any part of our music department staffing or budget.

The strength and vibrancy of the music and performing arts programs is a major reason why we love our school system. Music and performing has been an important creative outlet for each of our seven children, and improved the overall quality of their educational experience.

Our kids have loved learning from Ms. Rostkoski, Mrs. Ventres, Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Pekar and Mr. Wilson, and have truly benefited from their music instruction.

Our younger kids have been inspired by watching the concerts and shows of their older siblings and friends. The youngest are counting down the years until they are old enough to play in the wind ensemble, or sing with the select singers and perform in the LOLHS musical. Let's ensure our kindergartners have the same opportunities to learn and grow that our current high school seniors had.

Sincerely,

Doug McAdams
Stephanie McAdams

16 Meadowlark Rd
Lyme CT 06371

Parents of:

Grace McAdams, '22

Anna McAdams, '24, Select Singers & LOLHS musicals

Bridget McAdams, '26, band & choir

David McAdams, '28, wind ensemble & jazz band

Mary McAdams, '30, band choir & LOLMS musicals

Catherine McAdams, '35

Elizabeth McAdams, '37

Sent from my iPhone

Delaura, Jeanne

From: Mary Powell StLouis <mepstlouis@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, May 2, 2025 4:04 PM
To: Kemp, Jason (BOE); James, Anna (BOE); Shoemaker, Martha (BOE); Staab, Christopher (BOE); Fogliano, Susan (BOE); Brown, Scott (BOE); Dean-Frazier, Laura (BOE); Lodge, Gavin (BOE); Lowry, Alexander (BOE)
Cc: Delaura, Jeanne
Subject: Letter to BOE - budget referendum and undesignated fund. Follow the suit of Old Lyme

Dear Region 18 Board of Education members:

I am copying here my Op-Ed that was recently published on lymeline.com about the upcoming budget referendum.

I hope that you take value in my suggestions on use of the undesignated/reserve fund as described below. You should be inspired to take action on use of the undesignated/reserve fund after the Town of Old Lyme stepped up in a majority vote to use $800,000 from their rainy day fund to lower the tax burden on town residents for this year. My suggestion on use of the reserve fund is for multiple years until debt service declines. The reserve balance would remain flat for these years.

While hopefully much of the introduction is a review for you, I took the time to explain in detail the statutes for the benefit of other town residents that may not be familiar with them.

Thank you, Mary Powell-St Louis

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Town residents have received their postcard reminder about the 2025-2026 district budget meeting and referendum vote from Regional 18 school district both scheduled for May 5 and May 6 respectively.

By means of background information on the school budgeting process, it is important to understand some of the Connecticut school laws defined by the general statutes. According to the Connecticut General Statute (CGS) Section 10-262 (j) on minimum budget requirements, a school budget may not be less than the budget from the prior fiscal year except for limited circumstances defined in the statute. Additionally, the CGS Section 10-51 (d) (1) was amended in 2024, such that a regional school district can create a "reserve fund for educational purposes" rather than the prior designation of such fund for only "capital and non recurring expenditures." The statute had also been amended in 2021 to change the amount of appropriation of funds for regional school districts from the current fiscal year's budget from 1% to 2%.

Key takeaway: Outside of exceptional circumstances a school budget can never go down and there has been expansion for a regional school district like Lyme/Old Lyme in terms of how a budget surplus can be used.

The Region 18 school district has long taken the opportunity to fund their "undesignated fund" or reserve fund for at least the last 10 years (per the annual October Board of Education meeting minutes on the district website). For the last 4 years since the change in the statute to support 2% funding of the reserve fund, Region 18 has appropriated approximately $700,000 annually to the reserve. The current reserve fund balance stands at $3.1 million. Although the Board of Education has not formally approved any of the current earmarked projects in the reserve, they are formulated in the 5-year facilities plan for the district. There is no reason to doubt that at the October 2025 Board of Education meeting the board will again vote to fund the reserve based on past experience and determination of a budget balance (unaudited at the time of the decision) in a similar range of $700,000.

You may ask why these details matter? The 2025-2026 school district budget up for referendum stands at a 7.39% increase over the previous year's budget and over half of the increase represents debt service (bonds) predominantly related to the $57.5 million PK-8 building project. Debt service obligation (principal and interest) for the district is estimated to increase annually for the next five years then start to drop dramatically (Budget book 2025, page 30, district website).

Rather than increasing the budget as proposed to cover the current year debt service requirement, I recommend the Board consider the use of a portion of the reserve funds to dampen the impact of debt service on the budget in the next five years.

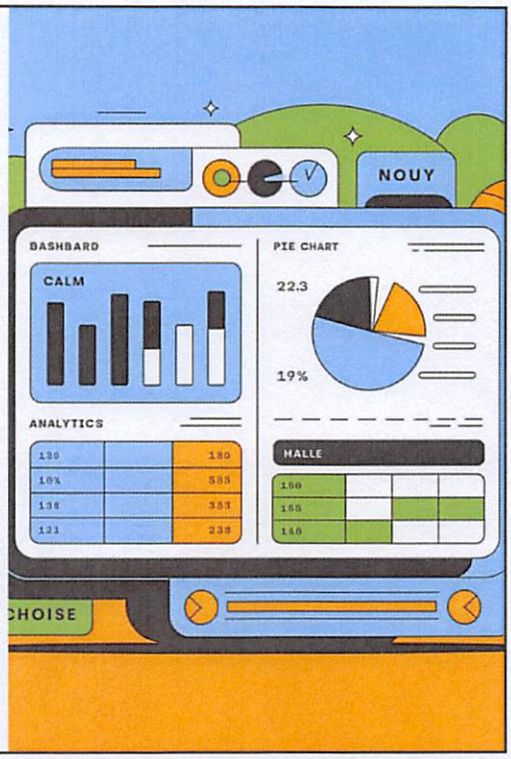
Why not use all the reserve? – well, we don't want to do that as it could adversely impact the credit rating of the district for future debt service. Further, the forecasted campus improvement projects could not be funded for the foreseeable future.

My suggestion is to use a portion of the reserve, equivalent to the maximum allowable 2% of budget holdback. Instead of increasing the budget by 7.39% to $39,650,803 the requested budget could be about $38.5 million or a 5.5% increase. Presuming the recent historical trend of budget surplus continues, this strategy would limit the growth of the budget until the debt service started to decline in five years, at which time the contribution to the reserve fund could be resumed.

I hope that the residents of Lyme and Old Lyme consider contacting the board of education members about the above issues and that the board takes this into consideration at the district budget meeting on Monday May 5.

Panorama: Transforming School Data Management

Panorama provides a comprehensive view of student success through centralized reporting and data analytics.





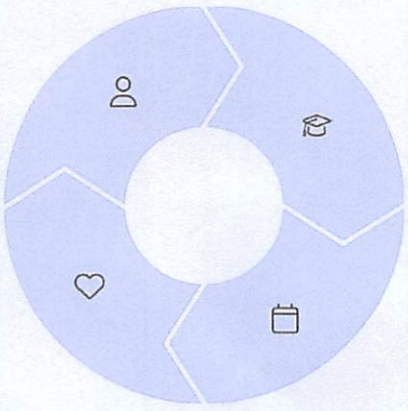
Comprehensive Data Integration

Demographics

Complete student profiles pulled from Powerschool

Attendance and Incident Tracking

Daily and class-level attendance as well as discipline logs



Academic Data

Report card, district/state testing, MTSS intervention logs and progress monitoring.

SEL Surveys and CTE Pathway Monitoring

(Not used by Region 18 Schools)

Panorama syncs daily with district systems including state testing distribution engines. This integration provides real-time information for progress monitoring.



Powerful Analytics and Reporting

Customizable Dashboards

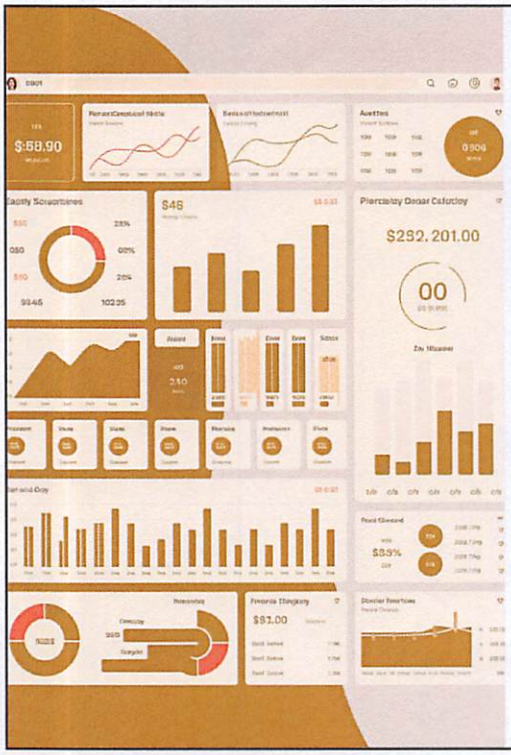
What data is seen (testing, etc.)

Data Visualization

Data is converted to accessible graphs for easy interpretation.

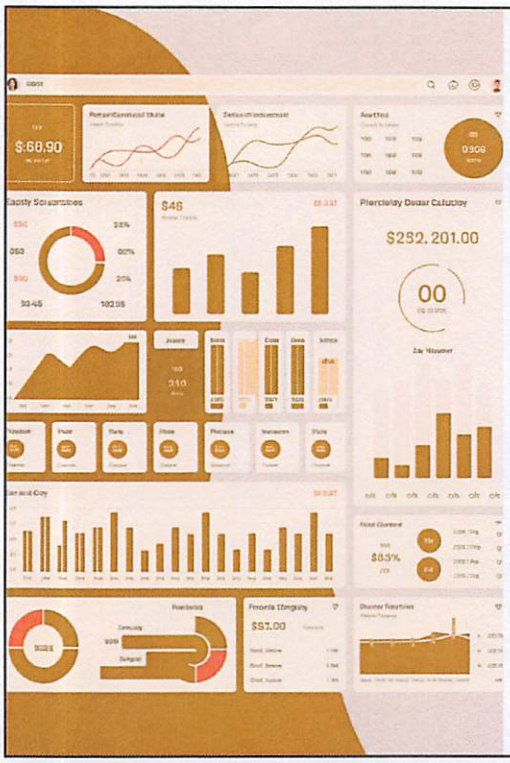
Trends

Monitor performance changes over time for educational planning and actionable insights.



Triangulating Data

- Attendance
- Benchmarking Data
  - Across a Year
  - Across Multiple Years
- Curriculum Assessment Data
- Additional Data Gathered through the SAT process
- Academic SRBI Progress Monitoring Data
- Behavioral SRBI Progress Monitoring Data
- Discipline Data

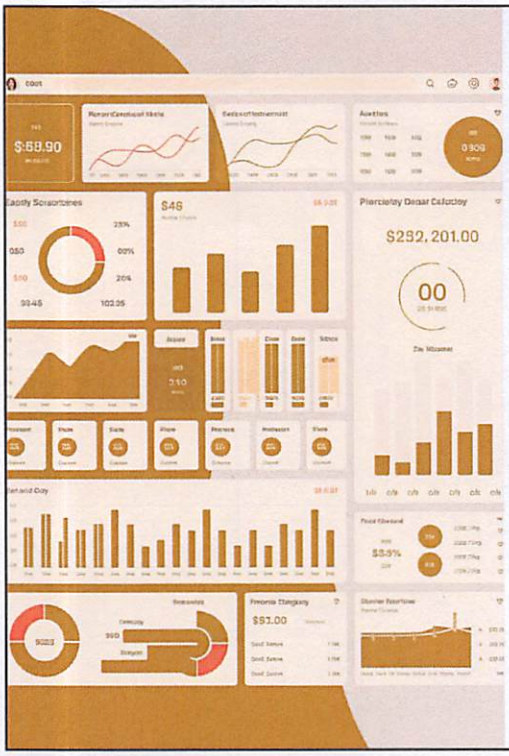


Transitioning to the HS

Snapshot of a student based on past & present performance.

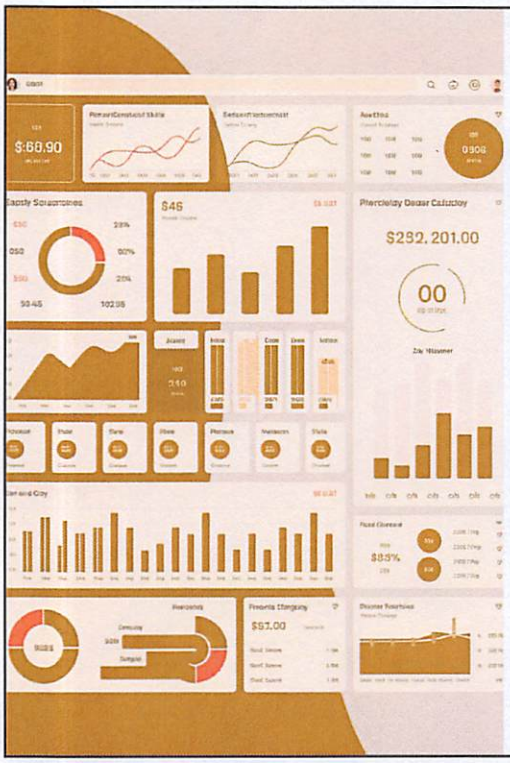
- Current grades
- Standardized testing
- Attendance
- Discipline Data

Ability to better understand student's profile



Panorama will support SRBI programs across the District. Specifically, it will:

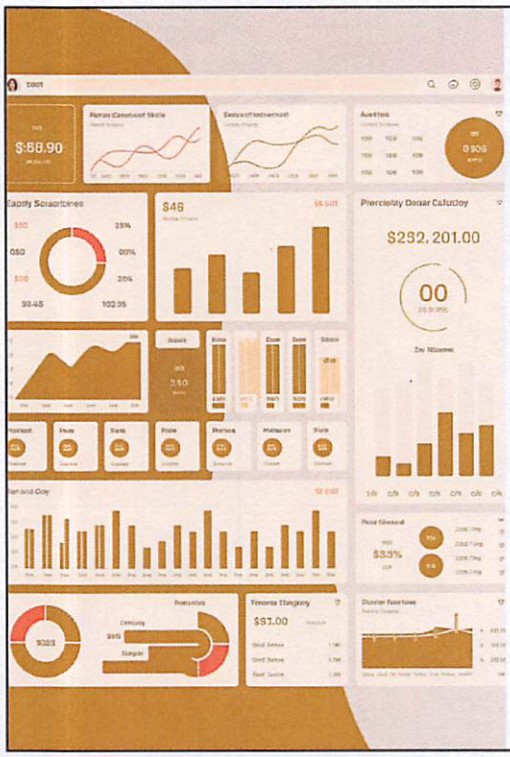
- Support progress monitoring and intervention tracking
- Provide for intervention "look-backs"
- Aggregate student data in one place, which will helps teams to make data-based decisions





Parallel work:

- More targeted goal setting
- Improving specificity of communication to families
- Increased frequency of data meetings
- Shared ownership of support



While we are pleased with many aspects of Panorama we are still waiting for some customization and are not 100% satisfied with reports and how data is visualized in the intervention progress monitoring section.

Initial Proposed Programming

Level	Proposal	Considerations
Elementary	0.8 LC/0.2 PreK 1.2 MC (.2 to be covered by MS/HS staff)	• Implement instrumental lessons beginning in Grade 4 • Implement choral music at Mile Creek School, and expand choral music at Lyme Consolidated School, to allow for a weekly 30-minute chorus class for Grades 3, 4, and 5 • Smaller lessons sizes and earlier start to full band rehearsals for Mile Creek.
Middle School	0.975 Vocal Instruction 0.975 Instrumental Instruction 0.3 General Music/Impact	• Implement 6th Grade General Music, and music courses within 7th and 8th grade IMPACT
High School	0.6 Vocal Instruction 0.4 Instrumental Instruction 0.6 Electives	• Adjust programming as proposed to classify Music Theory as STEM • Unified Voices

'25-'26 Offerings

Level	Proposal	Implementation

Elementary	• Instrumental in Grade 4
	• Choir Grades 3-5
		• Mile Creek:
		  ○ 4th Instrumental: Co-taught by Sarah Evans and Matthew Guevara
		  ○ 3rd Grade Choir: Matthew Guevara
		  ○ 4th Grade Choir: Kristine Pekar
		  ○ 5th Grade Choir: Laura Ventres
		• Lyme Consolidated:
		  ○ 4th/5th Instrumental and 3-5 Choir taught by Melissa Rostkoski

Middle School	• Offer General Music	• 7th and 8th Grade Music Impact course taught by Jacob Wilson III
High School	• Look at music course classification	• Music Theory courses now classified as STEM

Proposals Not Implemented

Level	Proposal	Reason for tabling
Elementary	• Lower lesson size for 5th Grade Instrumental at Mile Creek	• First year instruction will now begin in 4th Grade • '26-'27 5th grade students will be second year players.
Middle School	• Offer General Music in 6th Grade	• Priority placed on implementing music courses in grades 7 and 8 as all students already receive music in 6th grade through band and chorus
High School	• Unified Voices	• Student enrollment

Music Staffing

Melissa Rostkoski: PK-5 General Music, 3-5 Choir, 4-5 Instrumental (LC and CS)

Matthew Guevara: 1-5 General Music, 3rd Grade Choir, 4-5 Instrumental (MC)

Laura Ventres: 5-8 Choir, 6-8 Choral DS Lessons (MC and MS)

Sarah Evans: 4th Grade Instrumental, 6-8 Instrumental and DS Lessons (MC and MS)

Jacob Wilson III: 9-12 Instrumental and Electives, 7-8 Music IMPACT (HS and MS)

Kristine Pekar: K General Music, 4th Grade Choir, 9-12 Choir and Electives (HS and MC)