

The Business Meeting of the New London Board of Education was held on May 27, 2025 in the New London Public Schools' Welcome Center and via Zoom Webinars.

1. Call to Order

President Maynard-Adams called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

Present for the Board of Education: President – Elaine Maynard-Adams
Vice-President – Bianca Alexis-Sylvain
Secretary – Nathan Caron

Board Members Present: Karen Bergin (*attended virtually*)
Alisha Blake (*attended virtually, disconnected at 9:33 p.m.*)
Danni Cruz
Susan Hambey

Present for the administration: Dr. Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of Schools

Due to Board members attending virtually, votes were taken by roll call vote.

2. Student of the Month and Employee of the Quarter Recognitions

The Board of Education recognized the Students of the Month from each school:

- Early Childhood Center at B.P. Mission:
 - Student of the Month: Alexander de la Cruz
 - Non-Certified Employee of the Quarter: Yoya Kapeli
 - Certified Employee of the Quarter: Kathy Loukoumis
- Winthrop STEM Elementary Magnet School:
 - Student of the Month: Myles Bezanson
 - Non-Certified Employee of the Quarter: Debra Bienkowski Ferino
 - Certified Employee of the Quarter: Emily Ellis
- Nathan Hale Arts Magnet School:
 - Student of the Month: Noah Peck
 - Non-Certified Employee of the Quarter: Yolanda Thornton
 - Certified Employee of the Quarter: David Moore
- C.B. Jennings International Elementary Magnet School:
 - Student of the Month: Esmerelda 'Esme' Nohemy Hernandez Martinez
 - Non-Certified Employee of the Quarter: Damani Thomas
 - Certified Employee of the Quarter: Janell Haggerty
- Bennie Dover Jackson Multi-Magnet Middle School Campus:
 - Student of the Month: Michael "Trae" Edwards
 - Non-Certified Employee of the Quarter: Kendra Drinkwater

- Certified Employee of the Quarter: Betsey Russell
- New London High School Multi-Magnet Campus:
 - Student of the Month: Nicholas Churis
 - Non-Certified Employee of the Quarter: Megan LaFleur
 - Certified Employee of the Quarter: Darcey Collins
- New London Adult Education:
 - Student of the Month: Liseth Beatriz Bajaña Alvarado
- Central Office:
 - Employee of the Quarter: Brenda Santana

3. Public Comment

Sarah Turner, New London – Ms. Turner shared that she could not imagine how difficult it has been in regards to the budget, and deciding which programs would be affected as it is so much. She explained she wanted to share that last week her daughter came home from school, and when she asked her daughter which positions would be cut, her daughter responded that she had been at a National Honor Society meeting during which it was shared which cuts would be made. Her daughter also said to her that a teacher had been notified while bringing students to a tennis match, which resulted in having tears in front of the students. Ms. Turner shared that she had called Human Resources and had a conversation expressing her displeasure of hearing this information. She added that she could not imagine the difficult position that everyone is in, but believes this could have been done in a better way.

4. Reports and Communications

- Board Chairperson's Report

Ms. Maynard-Adams reported that she is always impressed with the talents and achievements of our students, and is grateful for every staff member. Evenings like tonight are always satisfying to start with, but it will not be when the night is over with the upcoming difficult conversations. She is grateful for the opportunity to recognize the students. She stated that she is continuing to work with our local State Senator for additional funding for education and has also looped in the area State Representatives. The legislature wraps up their work in about a week and she is hopeful that there will be a positive budget. She shared that there is an ugly task before the Board this evening, which is to reduce the budget by approximately \$4.5 million. She stated that this is nothing that anyone in the room wants to do, but that it is a response to the vote of the City Council and Board of Finance to flat fund education. She shared that this is the same City Council and Board of Finance which managed to find additional dollars for every other department in the City to cover their contractual increases, but did not for education.

Considering local contributions for educational budgets, New London ranks third from the bottom of all 165 cities in the State. The only two below New London are Hartford and Bridgeport. The poorest cities in the state manage to do better. There

is not a single person in the room this evening who wants to do this, but they recognize that they have no choice.

5. Information and Reports

i. Superintendent's Report

▪ New London Adult Education Updates

- Director Denise Spellman gave a presentation to the Board on New London Adult Education updates.
 - This presentation included information on the following topics:
 - Our Staff
 - What We Do
 - Overall Data
 - Adult Education Funding
 - School Improvement Plan
 - Even Start & Family Literacy
 - Instructional Innovation Class
 - Workforce Programs
 - Workforce Programs Data
 - Transitions Program
 - Adult Education & Family Literacy Week at the CT State Capital Building
 - St. Patrick's Day Parade & Community Service Project

A copy of this presentation in its entirety is available upon request.

6. Approval of the Minutes

- May 12, 2025 – Business Meeting

Motion by Ms. Hambey, seconded by Mr. Cruz, to approve the May 12, 2025 Business Meeting Minutes.

Motion carried, 6-0-1

Abstaining: Mr. Cruz

7. Approval of the Consent Agenda

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Ms. Alexis-Sylvain, that the following items, as set forth on the Consent Agenda for the Business Meeting of May 27, 2025 be approved unless removed by a Board member or the Superintendent of Schools:

A. Action Items

- I. Approve the Revised SY2024-2025 District Calendar
- II. Approve the Revised SY2024-2025 Year-Round Calendar

III. Approve Line Item Transfers as Recommended by the Finance & Audit Committee

Motion carried, 7-0

8. Items Pulled from the Consent Agenda

- a. Approve Policy 5131.81 – Use of Private Technology Devices by Students for its First Reading as Recommended by the Policy Committee

Motion by Ms. Hambey, seconded by Ms. Maynard-Adams, to approve Policy 5131.81 – Use of Private Technology Devices by Students for its First Reading as Recommended by the Policy Committee.

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Mr. Caron to strike the last sentence of the Policy.

Ms. Hambey also requested that the page 3 have a section header for “Improper Purpose”

Motion carried, 7-0

- b. Approve the Proposed Non-Staffing Reductions to the SY2025-2026 Budget

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Ms. Alexis-Sylvain, to approve the Proposed Non-Staffing Reductions to the SY2025-2026 budget.

Mr. Funk, Chief Financial Officer, clarified that on the top of page 3 of the document, a positive number reflects a cut and a negative number reflects an add.

Ms. Maynard-Adams asked how many students are served by the cosmetology program which is a listed reduction. Dr. Hills-Papetti, Assistant Superintendent, shared that there are 6 students who earned certificates for various things in this program. She is unsure of what next year’s interest would have been as the program was reduced. Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that this is a reduction of a program which the Commission for Disconnected Youth had recommended. She shared that this Commission had included many Mayors from different areas of CT, including our New London Mayor, so this would be the elimination of a program that the commission he had sat on determined would be necessary to serve these students.

Ms. Bergin shared that after attending the presentation of that Commission and talking about opportunities for disengaged, unemployed and uneducated youth, we are taking away an opportunity for the very students the Commission was charged for addressing. When the Mayor supported that work, and other mayors and city council members across the region echoed the same, we are doing the

exact opposite of what was discussed in that presentation and not supporting kids who could have this opportunity as a pathway to broaden their experience.

Mr. Caron asked about the ADEC reduction. Mr. Funk clarified that ADEC funds the City's pension that many of our retired employees participate in. He shared that there has been a question all along whether the Board should have to make a contribution, as they make a contribution through every paycheck. The ADEC payment comes once a year, and the first time the Board was asked to pay for it was in 2018.

Mr. Caron also asked about the reduction in the maintenance budget to match the City. Mr. Gautier, Executive Director of Operations stated that it is expected that they will likely run out of money during the year. He explained that he shared this information with the School Maintenance and Building Committee and how the remaining funds will be allocated. \$361,000 of the remaining funds has already been allocated for scheduled and required maintenance. There will not be any cosmetic repairs. There is a plan for three tiers for maintenance. As a brief overview, tier 1 includes the required inspections for fire, sprinklers and elevators. Tier 2 includes critical monitoring such as the HVAC system and playgrounds. The remaining funds will be used towards critical repairs. If it can cause damage to a building or someone, the repair will be completed, otherwise all other work orders will be put on hold as only approximately \$100,000 will remain. He shared that he will have a report presented to the SMBC every month which will review the budget. There are City Councilors, the Mayor and Finance Director McBride on that meeting, so they will be made aware. Should there be a need for additional funds regarding required maintenance or repairs, the hope is that the City will provide an additional appropriation.

Mr. Funk stated that this is what is called building a budget to available revenues. This is not the amount of funding that is needed to maintain the buildings, but it is what we have. We are not budgeting less than our source of revenue budgets, but budgeting what is available to us.

Motion carried, 7-0

- c. Approve the Proposed Staffing Reductions to the SY2025-2026 Budget

Motion by Ms. Maynard-Adams, seconded by Mr. Caron, to approve the proposed staffing reductions to the SY2025-2026 Budget.

Mr. Gautier confirmed that there will be an impact to groundskeeping operations with the reduction of the groundskeeping positions. There will now be only one full time position to do all of the schools in district.

Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that her understanding is that every position on this list that has a person in it, those people have been spoken to and notified. She asked about the human element of these reductions. Ms. Christine Pemberton,

Executive Director of Talent and Human Resources stated that there has been a tiered approach. The leaders and directors of the buildings and programs and supervisors have met with staff about affected positions. The Human Resources Department has also reached out to each affected employee and offered an in-person meeting. These meetings have been ongoing. There is a letter and transition guide that has been drafted by the HR department which will be shared with each affected employee as well. The HR department is offering ways to support the employees both internally, as well as with resume review and external transitions as needed. These have been challenging conversations which are being done with grace and empathy as much as possible.

Ms. Maynard-Adams asked about the Welcome Center and how it will function with the proposed reductions. Ms. Pemberton shared there will be at least one staff member at the Welcome Center opening where guests are welcomed and will be redirected to the appropriate location and office. There was a discussion about notifying the City directly of the impact and that City residents will be redirected to the City for supports if we are unable to assist.

Mr. Cruz asked about the proposed reduction of the crossing guard positions, noting that they provide safety to the community. He asked if the conversation has been started with the City for taking these on. Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that for the last five years she has told the Mayor that this is a public safety issue and does not belong in the Board's budget. Mr. Gautier stated that he had not yet had this conversation this year, but has had it in previous years. The department has assessed the different areas, and there is one crossing guard position remaining. That position is the crosswalk on Williams Street between the middle school and Jennings, as there is no stop sign at that crosswalk.

Mr. Cruz noted the reduction of the Supervisor of MLL and explained his concerns for that reduction and ultimately that department. Dr. Hills-Papetti shared that Ms. Carrillo, Director of Multi-lingual Learners has done a lot of work to make the department stable. She noted that Ms. Carrillo's primary location will be at the high school campus next year, and that there are multiple 12 month positions in that department that will support the elementary and middle schools. Mr. Cruz asked if this cut and the cut of the assistant principal at the high school will affect the operations of the school. Dr. Hills-Papetti replied that Principal Mahon and his team have begun discussion of what it will look like with reduced staff. There was a discussion about the different staff who speak Spanish to be able to assist students and families at the school, and there was reassurance that supports are available. Ms. Maynard-Adams said that this entire package is difficult, but the bottom line is that there cannot be a reduction of \$4.5 million without reducing staff.

Ms. Bergin echoed Mr. Cruz's concerns and sentiments and added that she is always uncomfortable with the idea that while our staff has done an amazing job of what this would look like, there is no way to go forward saying that 'we've got this' because this isn't something we should say. This is not fluff, these are

essential faculty and staff who make a difference to our students and staff every day. These reductions will not be accomplished without a huge impact, and we will not be able to deliver what was done previously. She continued that it is important to be very honest and bold saying that it will look different, and services will not be at the same level they have been at before.

Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that no one wants to be doing this but it has to come from somewhere. She stated that she is happy to offer a letter to the Mayor's Office to say what was eliminated and where the City will need to pick up the slack. All of these things will have an effect on city operations.

Ms. Hambey asked if there were additional attendance motivators than what was being reduced, and Ms. Rivera, Executive Director of School and Family Supports shared that the responsibilities regarding student attendance would have to be absorbed by others and restructured.

Mr. Cruz stated that this was a blatant failure of the Council on our students and families. He wished any of them, or the Mayor, were at the meeting or on the call this evening. These reductions are not the fault of the school district, but are the fault of the Council, Mayor, and other leaders and it is disgusting. They are failing the community, and the Board has been picking up the pieces that they have dropped for years.

There was a question regarding the expected ECS funds, and Mr. Funk stated that those funds have not yet been received by the City, but they suggested they may be given in the form of a grant rather than an appropriation.

Ms. Maynard-Adams stated that in the winter, the Board eliminated the nurse at the Williams School, and this proposal includes the elimination of the nurse at St. Joseph's School. She explained that she will include this as part of her communication to the Mayor and the President of City Council that these are the city's responsibilities and need to figure out what they will do with them.

Ms. Bergin stated that for the people who are not educators or not particularly advocates for public education, and have described the budget as lacking transparency or being disorganized or having fluff, although burdensome to undertake the task it will be important to show that there is a definition of what the impact of these cuts are.

Motion carried, 5-2

***Voting no: Ms. Blake
Ms. Bergin***

9. Board Comments, Questions

Mr. Cruz thanked all staff at the table. He stated that as hard as it is for the Board, it is just as hard for the administration, especially to have these conversations with staff. He

appreciates all the staff and everything that they do. He stated that while he will be leaving the Board, he is not leaving the community and will not stop using his voice.

Ms. Alexis-Sylvain thanked all of those who have reached out over the past week to express their concerns about the budget reductions.

Ms. Hambey stated that due to a final vote by the City Council to flat fund the schools, the Board is doing this difficult and sad work. What drives and helps the Board to get through this is the dedication and love that is there for the inspiring staff and students. As a good note, she was happy to hear about the iReady success of students and teachers at Winthrop, the National Junior Honor Society at the middle school, and the inspiration of the Adult Education department.

8. Adjournment

Ms. Blake was disconnected prior to the vote to adjourn.

Motion by Mr. Cruz, seconded by Ms. Hambey, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried, 6-0

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Caron
Secretary, Board of Education