



Board of Directors Regular Business MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: September 11, 2025
Draft Posted: September 16, 2025
Approved Posted: October 9, 2025

Present: Dale Bernardoni, Chester/Grades K-6; Scott Brown, Lyme & Old Lyme/Region 18; Katherine Ericson, LEARN; Jennifer Favolora, Killingworth/Region 17; Elizabeth Fernandes, Westbrook; Katie Gauthier, Stonington (Teams); Cindy Luty, Preston; Robert Mitchell, Montville; Chet Stefanowicz, North Stonington; and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford (Teams)

Not Attending and Not Represented: Eric Bauman, East Lyme; Alisha Blake, New London; Mary Ann Connelly, Madison; A. Terri Garrity, East Haddam; Mary Harris, Ledyard; Nancy Johnston, Essex/Grades K-6; Gregory Perry, Norwich; Sean Reith, Salem; Beverly Washington, Groton; Jane Wisialowski, Old Saybrook; Vacant, Chester, Deep River, Essex Region #4; Vacant, Clinton; Vacant, Deep River/Grades K-6; Vacant, East Hampton; and Vacant, Guilford

Guests: Michael Belden, LEARN Chief Financial Officer; Dr. Linda Darcy, LEARN Director of Teaching and Learning; Dr. Ryan Donlon, LEARN Associate Executive Director; Kristin Gemaly, Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) Literacy Coach & LEARN LEA President (Teams); Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources (Teams); Deisha Quinones, LEARN Teacher of the Year; Mariana Reyes, LEARN RMMS Principal; Dr. Wendy Jean Sonstrom, LEARN Regional Coordinator of Student Information; Carla Strecker, Assistant Director of Special Programs; and Anhelina Yevhlevska, LEARN Paraeducator of the Year

Meeting began at 9:06 a.m.

- 1. Call to Order:** Pledge of Allegiance
- 2. Audience and Guests:** Introductions
- 3. Public Comment:** No public comment

***Request Motion to move agenda item 9.1 Recognition of LEARN’s 2025 Teacher and Para Educator [correctly, paraeducator] of the Year to precede regular business meeting agenda items.**

Motion to move agenda item 9.1 Teacher and Para Educator [correctly, paraeducator] of the Year to precede agenda item 4

- **Presented by Chet Stefanowicz**
- **Second Scott Brown**
- **Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

Executive Director Ericson led the recognition of LEARN’s 2025 Paraeducator and Teacher of the Year, honoring two outstanding educators for their contributions and impact.

Anhelina Yevhlevska, of the LEARN Transition Academy (LTA), was named LEARN’s 2025 Paraeducator of the Year. Anhelina was introduced by Carla Strecker, Assistant Director of Special Programs, who highlighted Anhelina’s role as a Registered Behavior Technician, her dedication to supporting students with complex disabilities, and her ongoing studies to become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). Ms. Strecker emphasized Anhelina’s data-driven and compassionate approach to student support.

Deisha Quinones, of the Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS), was recognized as the LEARN 2025 Teacher of the Year. Deisha was introduced by Principal Mariana Reyes, who shared Deisha’s journey through the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program (CTRP), her deep commitment to equity, inclusion, and literacy, and her active involvement in school and community initiatives — including the multicultural education committee and Girls on the Run.

- 4. Reading and/or Review of Correspondence:** Executive Director Ericson shared email correspondence from the Early Care and Education Division expressing appreciation to LEARN’s Early Childhood staff members for attending the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) staff meeting and highlighting the importance of the real-world context and experiences regarding Early Start CT and Local Governance Partnerships (LGPs).
- 5. Superintendents’ Perspective:** Dr. Ryan Donlon, LEARN Associate Executive Director, to present on the 2025-2026 SY opening of LEARN Magnet Schools.

Dr. Donlon provided a detailed update on the LEARN’s family of magnet schools, highlighting ongoing initiatives and progress in alignment with the district’s strategic vision for equity, academic achievement, and student engagement. With input from school leaders, the implementation of a three-year grade reconfiguration was outlined to design and establish a seamless pre-K–12 educational pathway—The Friendship School (TFS) now serves pre-K and kindergarten, Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) covers grades 1–6, and Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS) and Three Rivers Middle College Magnet High School (TRMC) serve the upper grades. According to Dr. Donlon, the academic data showed positive trends, including reduced chronic absenteeism, increased student diversity, and high graduation rates at TRMC, with notable literacy gains attributed to professional development, coaching, and the rollout of a new literacy program. Behavior incidents have decreased by 38%, especially at RMMS, due to trauma-informed practices and intentional efforts to foster inclusive, supportive school cultures. Enrollment and application data reflected growing demand, with record applications at TFS and TRMC, and targeted retention strategies at RMMS to support continuity and maintain diversity through lotteries and dual language offerings. To conclude, the leadership team shared progress on district-wide strategic planning, including the creation of a data dashboard to track key outcomes and capacity-building initiatives aimed at supporting school leaders through professional development and responsive feedback mechanisms.

6. Consent Agenda:

- 6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—June 12, 2025
- 6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of August 31, 2025
- 6.3 Approval of Grant Applications—None

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

- Presented by Cindy Luty
- Second Dale Bernardoni
- Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against

7. Information from the Executive Director:

- 7.1 Hiring—Resignations and new hires, including trend reports/ Executive Director Ericson provided an update on the agency’s staffing efforts, emphasizing both recent successes and ongoing challenges, with support from the Human Resources department. The agency has hired nearly 30 non-certified staff and welcomed 16 new teachers, including five special educators. A two-day orientation for more than 35 new educators was held to introduce them to the agency’s vision and support their integration into the organization. Despite this progress, 33 vacancies remain—primarily in interventionist roles—prompting continued exploration of innovative recruitment strategies. Moving forward, the agency plans to further modernize its recruitment processes to better appeal to younger candidates and address persistent staffing gaps.
- 7.2 Distributions —AESA Press Release; Executive Director’s AESA (Association of Educational Service Agencies) Summer Conference Leadership Series Reflection; “Marine Science Magnet High School of Southeastern CT” — [U.S.News](#); National Coast Guard Museum Association “Stories That Matter” (Handout at meeting only); and the 2025 LEARN Annual Report (*Handout at meeting only, Will also be made available online*)
- 7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—August 22, 2025/ Executive Director Ericson highlighted several key initiatives and events from the summer that underscore the agency’s continued commitment to excellence and innovation. The Extended School Year (ESY) Program was a success, with Ocean Avenue LEARNing Academy (OALA) and the LEARN Transition Academy (LTA) hosting students from across the region. Every student engaged in meaningful, community-based experiences, supported by staff, including partnerships with New England Science and Sailing, the Waterford Recreation Department, the Sea Unicorns, and the Yellow Farmhouse.

Additionally, the fully implemented Regional Shared Service Solutions (RSSS) Program delivered significant financial benefits to participating districts, with savings ranging from \$5,000 to \$87,000 depending on the level of contracted services. Three new districts joined the program this fiscal year, leveraging LEARN’s back-office expertise to reduce costs. The 2025 LEARN Convocation was shared via video across all agency sites, uniting staff around this year’s theme, “Cultivating the Power of We,” which reflects both the agency’s achievements and its forward-looking vision. LEARN also hosted its annual Administrative Retreat in August, bringing together 29 returning administrators. The retreat centered on building leadership capacity through the reading of *Trust and Inspire* by Stephen Covey and the development of actionable steps to further embody LEARN’s mission and vision.

- 7.4 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes—July 25, 2025 and August 22, 2025/ Executive Director Ericson reported that the Early Childhood LEARNING School construction project continues to move forward through key phases of planning and development, reflecting strong momentum and collaborative engagement among stakeholders. The design phase has been completed, and while the final land purchase is still in progress, LEARN recently signed an early access agreement with the Town of Waterford to facilitate pre-construction activities. Formal approval for both the school project and the adjacent pickleball court has been granted by the town, and the Waterford Representative Town Meeting (RTM) has officially approved a proposed change to the land purchase agreement. Collaboration between LEARN’s Design Team and the Architectural Design Team remains ongoing, with the Architectural Review Board having reviewed and approved the plans. As of now, 50% of the construction document review is complete, and work on the 90% documents is actively underway. Value management efforts continue to ensure the project remains efficient and cost-effective. Negotiations related to the on-site cell tower are progressing positively. A meeting with the Connecticut Department of Administrative Services (DAS) is scheduled for October, with groundbreaking anticipated between January and February. The school is currently on track for a 2027 opening.
- 7.5 Legislative Updates – LEARN has proactively extended invitations to the region’s state legislators to participate in a series of upcoming school and program tours aimed at highlighting the agency’s educational services, impact, and funding needs. In response to emerging legislative developments that could significantly affect educational service agencies, the RESC Alliance has mobilized efforts to engage policymakers. As part of this advocacy, LEARN has launched monthly legislator school and program tours to provide firsthand insight into its outplacement programs and the broader scope of services offered.



These tours are intended to raise awareness and build support for sustained and equitable funding. To date, three legislators have already been scheduled for visits. Additionally, the Executive Director recently met with State Representative Leeper, State Representative Brown, and State Senator McCrory, State education committee members, to further discuss the agency’s mission and current priorities.

- 7.6 LEARN Agency Updates – Executive Director Ericson highlighted the opening of Creating Connections, an early childhood initiative currently serving eight children ages 9 months to 2 years, supported by a dedicated team of four staff members. Executive Director Ericson pointed out that despite a growing waitlist of 30 families, the program is experiencing challenges in filling a head teacher vacancy due to a limited pool of qualified applicants. Of the enrolled families, seven are utilizing Early Start-funded spaces, and six fall below 75% of the state median income. Current families served are from Quaker Hill, Oakdale, Uncasville, New London, and Waterford, reflecting a strong regional impact. Executive Director Ericson thanked the Board for completing the 2024-2025 Board Survey. Survey results included seven responses and conveyed very positive feedback, noting well-organized meetings, clear communication, and a sense of inclusion—even in virtual settings. Suggestions included increasing engagement in discussions, clarifying member roles outside of meetings, and remaining vigilant about scam emails targeting board members. Future topics of interest include teacher retention, special education innovations, legislative updates, and district-level best practices. Top priorities identified for the 2025–2026 school year include strategic planning, financial oversight, program evaluation, and maintaining a strong focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Additional program updates included continued enrichment activities for students in the LEARN Transition Academy (LTA), such as visits to the New London Recreation Center; engaging experiences through New England Science & Sailing (NESS); and the New London Landmark Group's use of facilities at Ocean Avenue LEARNing Academy (OALA) this past June.

8. Old Business: None

9. New Business:

- 9.1 Recognition of LEARN's 2025 Teacher and Para Educator [correctly, paraeducator] of the Year
**Moved to top of the Agenda.*
- 9.2 Revised Executive Committee Meeting Date – November 2025
- i. Due to the scheduling conflict with the CABA/CAPSS Conference, the Board of Directors is asked to approve rescheduling the November 21, 2025 Executive Committee meeting to Wednesday, November 19, 2025. This adjustment ensures participation in both the Executive Committee meeting and the annual conference.

Motion to approve the change of the November 2025 Executive Committee meeting date from November 21 to November 19, 2025.

- Presented by Scott Brown
- Second Dale Bernardoni
- Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against

- 9.3 New Policy #5144.2, Students, Series 5000; "Restorative Practices Response In Student Discipline"

Motion to approve New Policy 5144.2, Students, Series 5000; Restorative Practices Response In Student Discipline as presented.

- Presented by Cindy Luty
- Second Chet Stefanowicz
- Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against

- 9.4 New Policy #5166, Students, Series 5000; "Internal Review Board"

Motion to approve New Policy 5166, Students, Series 5000; Internal Review Board as presented.

- Presented by Chet Stefanowicz
- Second Jennifer Favalora

Motion made to amend the New Policy 5166 Students, Series 5000; from *Internal Review Board* to *Institutional Review Board*.

- Presented by Scott Brown
- Second Dale Bernardoni
- Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against

Motion to approve New Policy 5166, Students, Series 5000; Institutional Review Board as amended.

- Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against

- 9.5 Approve the request by Southeastern New England Marine Educators (SEMEME) to utilize designated facilities at Marine Science Magnet High School on October 4, 2025, from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., for the purpose of hosting the SEMEME Fall Conference. Requested spaces include the simulator, science classrooms, cafeteria, and access to the aqua lab for guided tours. The event does have an admission fee of \$40.00. Proceeds will support student scholarships, science fair awards, guest speaker honorariums, and website maintenance.

Motion to approve Southeastern New England Marine Educators' use of Marine Science Magnet High School's Simulator, science classrooms, the cafeteria, and aqua lab from 7:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., on October 4, 2025, to host the SEMEME Fall Conference as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Chet Stefanowicz**
- **Motion passed with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

10. Educational Perspective: None

11. Roundtable Discussion: None

12. Future Roundtable Topics: None

13. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 10:53 a.m.

- **Presented by Dale Bernardoni**
- **Second Chet Stefanowicz**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

Respectfully submitted by:
Jamella A. A. Etienne

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Meeting ID: 231 661 556 860 5
Passcode: Kh3nM6Rp