



Board of Directors Regular Business

MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: December 11, 2025
Draft Posted: December 18, 2025
Approved Posted: January 8, 2026

Present: Eric Bauman, East Lyme; Dale Bernardoni, Chester (Grades K-6); Scott Brown, Lyme & Old Lyme Region #18; Thomas Danehy, Clinton (Teams); Katherine Ericson, LEARN (Teams); Jennifer Favalora, Haddam & Killingworth Region #17 (Teams); Elizabeth Fernandes, Westbrook; Robert Mitchell, Montville; Chet Stefanowicz, North Stonington; Beverly Washington, Groton; Nancy Johnston, Essex/Grades K-6; and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford

Not Attending and Not Represented: Galen Cawley, Madison; Scott Garbini, New London; A. Terri Garrity, East Haddam; Katie Gauthier, Stonington; Mary Harris, Ledyard; Gregory Perry, Norwich; Sean Reith, Salem; Jane Wisialowski, Old Saybrook; Vacant, Chester, Deep River, Essex/Region #4 (Grades 7-12); Vacant, Deep River (Grades K-6); Vacant, East Hampton; Vacant, Guilford; and Vacant, Preston

Guests: Tara Amatrudo (Teams); Michael Belden, LEARN Chief Financial Officer; Bridgette Gordon-Hickey, LEARN Deputy Executive Director; Kristin Gemaly (Teams); Joanne Lund, LEARN Assistant Director of Business; Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources; Sarah Moon, LEARN Director of Special Services; Dr. Dianne Vumback, Superintendent of Montville Public Schools; and Leslie Zoll, Principal at CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA)

Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

- 1. Call to Order:** Pledge of Allegiance
- 2. Audience and Guests:** Introductions
- 3. Public Comment:** None
- 4. Reading and/or Review of Correspondence:** Workers' Compensation Trust Premium Return of \$77,838.00 for 2025
- 5. Superintendents' Perspective:** Dr. Dianne Vumback, Superintendent of Montville School District, presented to the Board on the Strategic Plan and Key District Initiatives of the district, starting with an overview of Montville's strategic plan and key initiatives, providing background on the district's structure and demographics, highlighting specialized programs, staffing, and student needs. Dr. Vumback talked about her leadership approach, emphasizing relationship-building, transparency, and continuity of the district's established vision, outlining challenges encountered during her tenure, including staffing transitions, state instructional mandates, operational demands, and facilities projects. Dr. Vumback also discussed the district's response through data-driven planning and the implementation of the TACO framework (Talent, Academics, Climate, and Operations). The presentation highlighted progress in academic accountability, leadership development, program expansion, facilities improvements, and operational efficiencies. Dr. Vumback concluded by acknowledging the dedication of district staff and leadership and expressed optimism for continued improvement focused on student success.

As read by Board Chair from the agenda notes: *"Before we move to the consent agenda, a quick reminder: For accurate meeting minutes, please state your full name clearly whenever you make or second a motion."*

6. Consent Agenda:

- 6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—November 13, 2025
- 6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of November 30, 2025
- 6.3 Approval of Grant Applications—**1.) LEARN Capital Improvement Grant 2025-2027 – \$4,156,020.00** state funding via Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) for the period July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2027; and **2.) Consolidated - Title III EL (20868) – Consortium Grant - \$14,892.00** Federal funding via CT Department of Education for the period September 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

- **Presented by Beverly Washington**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 11 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 reported that LEARN currently has 30 open positions, with recruitment efforts focused on nine critical roles, including Pre-K and special education teachers, a staffing specialist for Student Support Services, and various accounting positions. Recruitment has produced strong candidate pools, with some positions receiving over 100 applications. The selection process continues, emphasizing candidates’ alignment with the agency’s commitment to professional expertise, customer service, and regional mission.
- 7.2 Distributions — None
- 7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—November 19, 2025
- 7.4 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes, Special Meeting—November 20, 2025: Executive Director Ericson provided an update on the Early LEARNing Magnet School construction project. Bid packages have been posted statewide, with openings expected soon. Initial cost projections were based on a worst-case scenario, but current market conditions may result in more competitive pricing. Overall timing is favorable and strong bids for construction and subcontracting work support continued progress of the project.

7.5 Legislative Updates

7.6 LEARN Agency Updates: Executive Director Ericson provided updates on several LEARN initiatives and activities. The Capital Improvement Grant application, totaling approximately \$4 million, will support renovations at the Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS) and the Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS), with funding projected to go before the Bond Commission in January. Executive Director Ericson also participated in a RESC Alliance leadership meeting to coordinate statewide educational priorities and legislative advocacy efforts, as well as the 2025 AESA National Conference and Leadership Academy, gaining insights into innovative educational programs, leadership strategies, and best practices from other states. Additionally, Executive Director Ericson reported participation in the Connecticut Education Roundtable, the CAFE/CAPSS convention, and a press conference with Governor Lamont supporting early childhood programs. Agency highlights included expansion of the Creating Connections infant/toddler program, launch of the L.I.L.A. tool pilot for educators, and hosting an international leadership exchange with principals from China. LEARN also recognized staff achievements, including national recognition for Sarah Moon, Director of Special Education, and a nomination for Magnet Principal of the Year for Jessica Silvestro of The Friendship School (TFS). Upcoming events include a legislative breakfast in January hosted at LEARN, and the annual disABILITY Summit on Saturday, March 14, from 10 AM–3 PM at the Great Wolf Lodge Conference Center in Mashantucket, CT.

8. Old Business:

9. New Business:

9.1 Review 2024-2025 Draft Audit: CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) Principal, Leslie Zoll, presented to the Board

Principal Leslie Zoll presented the results of LEARN’s 2024-2025 financial audit that showed an unmodified opinion is expected, indicating that LEARN’s financial statements comply with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), with no compliance issues identified for state or federal programs. The audit reviewed key financial processes and controls, noting improvements in staffing, supervision, and procedures while maintaining one prior-year material weakness. As of June 30, 2025, LEARN’s total position was \$63.2 million, with a planned reduction in fund balance reflecting strategic investments in capital projects, including facility improvements and the Early LEARNing Magnet School. Management and auditors noted that the audit feedback supports ongoing financial improvements and underscores LEARN’s commitment to transparent and well-managed fiscal practices.

Motion to approve the 2024-2025 LEARN audit as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 11 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.2 LEARN Tuition/Service Rates 2026-2027: Attached in the agenda packet.

The Board reviewed and approved LEARN tuition and service rates for the 2026-2027 school year. LEARN Deputy Executive Director, Bridgette Gordon-Hickey, and LEARN Special Services Director, Sarah Moon, highlighted factors influencing the rates, including staffing challenges, rising costs, and evolving student needs. Adjustments were made to reflect actual expenditures for staffing, facilities, and student supports across diverse programs, including special education, medically fragile programs, and Extended School Year services. Rates for magnet programs, evaluations, and paraprofessionals were updated modestly, generally around 6.25%, to maintain high-quality programming and ensure resources are reinvested in student services. Leadership emphasized the importance of sustainable planning, workforce retention, and strategic partnerships to support districts effectively.

Motion to approve the LEARN Tuition/Service Rates 2026-2027 as presented.

- **Presented by Beverly Washington**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 9 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.3 Magnet Tuition Strategy Discussion

Executive Director Ericson provided an update on magnet tuition, noting that under current state law, the Board no longer has authority to adjust these rates. She explained that the funding model is not sustainable in the long term. Executive Director Ericson emphasized that the discussion is intended to maintain awareness of the issue, and future planning and advocacy efforts will focus on sustaining magnet program funding beyond the next fiscal year.

9.4 Pfizer Green Chemistry Team award for MSMHS

Motion to approve the LEARN Board of Directors to accept a monetary donation in the amount of \$5,000.00 from Pfizer, awarded in recognition of Marine Science Magnet High School's 2025 Green Chemistry Team, with funds to be administered in accordance with LEARN Policy 1330/ Gifts, Grants, and Bequests as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Beverly Washington**
- **Motion passed with 9 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.5 Stop & Shop School Food Pantry Program partners with Regional Multicultural Magnet School

Motion to approve the LEARN Board of Directors to accept a monetary donation in the amount of \$10,000.00 from Stop Shop, awarded from the Stop & Shop School Food Pantry Program to purchase items to stock the RMMS' school food pantry, with funds to be administered in accordance with LEARN Policy 1330/ Gifts, Grants, and Bequests as presented.

- **Presented by Beverly Washington**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 9 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

- 9.6 Approve the request by Connecticut Area Reef Society (CTARS) to utilize designated facilities at Marine Science Magnet High School on January 17, 2026 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., for the purpose of hosting the annual meeting for the Connecticut Area Reef Society. Requested spaces include the school lobby and the Aquaculture facility for guided tours. The event is free.

Motion to approve Connecticut Area Reef Society’s use of Marine Science Magnet High School’s lobby and Aquaculture facility from 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m., on January 17, 2026, to host the annual meeting of CTARS as presented.

- **Presented by Laurie Wolfley**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 9 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

10. Educational Perspective: None

11. Roundtable Discussion: Board members discussed emerging topics of interest for future meetings, such as student cell phone use, with participants sharing practices from their districts, including limited access in classrooms, designated use in cafeterias, and systems for accountability. Discussion highlighted both successes and challenges, as well as evolving parent perspectives on phone policies. Another topic was the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom. Members noted growing interest in developing policies and pilot programs to guide responsible and innovative AI use, citing examples from other schools and available resources.

12. Future Roundtable Topics: Student cell phones and AI

13. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 11: 20 a.m.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Beverly Washington**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 9 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

Respectfully submitted by:
Jamella A. A. Etienne

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