



Board of Directors Regular Business

MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: January 8, 2026

Draft Posted: January 9, 2026

Approved Posted: February 17, 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; Jennifer Favalora, Haddam & Killingworth Region #17; Elizabeth Fernandes, Westbrook; Katie Gauthier, Stonington (Teams); Marijke Kehrhahn, Old Saybrook; Robert Mitchell, Montville; Nancy Johnston, Essex/Grades K-6 (Teams); and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford (9:48 am Teams)

Not Attending and Not Represented: Galen Cawley, Madison; Scott Garbini, New London; A. Terri Garrity, East Haddam; Mary Harris, Ledyard; Gregory Perry, Norwich; Chet Stefanowicz, North Stonington; Beverly Washington, Groton; Vacant, Chester, Deep River, Essex/Region #4 (Grades 7-12); Vacant, Deep River (Grades K-6); Vacant, East Hampton; Vacant, Guilford; Vacant, Preston; and Vacant, Salem

Guests: Michael Belden, LEARN Chief Financial Officer; Dr. Ryan Donlon, LEARN Associate Executive Director; Kristin Gemaly (Teams); Joanne Lund, LEARN Assistant Director of Business; and Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources (Teams)

Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

- 1. Call to Order:** Pledge of Allegiance
- 2. Audience and Guests:** Introductions
- 3. Public Comment:**
- 4. Reading and/or Review of Correspondence:** None
- 5. Superintendents' Perspective:** New Board Member Orientation
- 6. Consent Agenda:**
 - 6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—December 11, 2025
 - 6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of December 31, 2025
 - 6.3 Approval of Grant Applications—None

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 10 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

7. Information from the Executive Director:

- 7.1 Hiring—Resignations and new hires, including trend reports (*Distributed prior to meeting*):
The agency currently has 34 open positions, with 22 posted online. Recent hires include Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), Early Childhood Coordinators, and Sub Intervention specialists. A new state test for ParaPathways, which replaces the previous ParaPro test, has introduced a short processing delay in hiring, as candidates now complete only the sections they did not pass. The LEARN administrative team now has one vacancy due to a recent resignation.
- 7.2 Distributions — None
- 7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—December 17, 2025
- 7.4 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes—December 18, 2025: The construction RFP process has been completed, with Gilbane selected as the construction company. The RFP attracted an average of 5.5 bids per subcontractor, reflecting a highly competitive process. Based on preliminary bids, the project is currently estimated to be \$14 million under budget. Final subcontractor selections will be made at an upcoming Building Committee meeting.
- 7.5 Legislative Updates: LEARN, with the six other RESCs, continues to advance its legislative agenda, with key priorities including magnet school funding and the Teacher Residency Program (TRP). LEARN is collaborating with the School and State Finance Project on a proposed student-centered K–12 funding model, which could impact future tuition rates. Current magnet student funding stability remains uncertain. LEARN is also participating in two statewide groups focused on education policy and innovation, including a RESC Alliance working group and an Education Innovation Cohort convened by the House Education Chair, to help shape priorities for the upcoming biennial session.
- 7.6 LEARN Agency Updates: Deisha Quinones, LEARN’s first Teacher Residency teacher and a former student, was named a semi-finalist for the Connecticut Teacher of the Year award. The agency continues to optimize RPIP grant programs and is preparing for the second School Choice Fair on January 10, with strong interest across its magnet schools. Upcoming events include a Legislative Breakfast on January 9 and the disABILITY Summit on March 14.
- 7.7 Executive Director Mid-Year Review

8. Old Business: None

9. New Business:

9.1 Proposed Salaries & Benefits 2026-2027

The board reviewed and approved LEARN's proposed salaries and benefits for union and non-union staff for the 2026-2027 school year. The plan includes cost-of-living adjustments and minimum wage increases, with proposed salary increases designed to remain competitive while ensuring equitable compensation. The board also discussed retirement plan participation, rising health insurance costs, substitute rates, and other strategies to maintain sustainable and competitive staff compensation.

Motion to Approve 2026-2027 LEARN Salaries & Benefits as presented.

- **Presented by Jennifer Favalora**
- **Second Scott Brown**
- **Motion passed with 10 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.2 Receipt of Three Rivers Middle College Magnet High School (TRMC) Special Purpose Magnet School Audit Report

The board acknowledged receipt of the Three Rivers Middle College Magnet High School (TRMC) Special Purpose Magnet School Audit Report, which was included in the meeting agenda packet.

9.3 Proposed Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and The LEARN Project, Inc. 2026-2027 Meeting Dates

Motion to Approve 2026-2027 LEARN Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and The LEARN Project, Inc. meeting schedules as presented.

- **Presented by Dale Bernardoni**
- **Second Eric Bauman**
- **Motion passed with 10 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.4 School Climate Report: Update on LEARN's compliance with statewide school climate policy, upcoming survey administration, improvement plans, and next steps for district supports and data use.

Associate Executive Director Dr. Ryan Donlon provided an update on LEARN's efforts to enhance compliance with new statewide legislation and improve systems for reporting and responding to student behaviors. The agency has implemented unified reporting procedures, reinforced staff professional development, and strengthened school climate committees. LEARN continues to use trauma-informed and restorative practices to support students, promote positive behavior, and ensure consistent, safe, and supportive learning environments across its schools.

- 9.5 Approve the request by Congregation Beth El to utilize the cafeteria at Ocean Avenue LEARNing Academy on September 11, 12, and 13, 2026, for the purpose of hosting their Rosh Hashana services. There are no fees associated with this event.

Motion to Approve Congregation Beth El’s use of the Ocean Avenue LEARNing Academy on September 11, 12, and 13, 2026 as presented.

- **Presented by Dale Bernardoni**
- **Second Jennifer Favalora**
- **Motion passed with 10 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

10. Educational Perspective: None

11. Roundtable Discussion: Student cell phones and AI—Board members shared updates and discussed emerging trends and challenges across schools. Topics included student cell phone use, with elementary and middle schools continuing to see positive results from current management strategies, and high school practices being monitored for potential adjustments. Members also discussed the responsible integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in classrooms, noting both opportunities for learning and the need for clear guidelines to ensure student safety and effective use. Additional topics included rising insurance costs, the upcoming budget season, and regional trends related to declining student enrollment, with members exchanging strategies and insights.

12. Future Roundtable Topics:

13. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 11:06 a.m.

- **Presented by Dale Bernardoni**
- **Second Jennifer Favalora**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 10 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

Respectfully submitted by:
Jamella A. A. Etienne

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