



Board of Directors Regular Business

MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: February 12, 2026

Draft Posted: February 17, 2026

Approved Posted: March 12, 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; Beverly Washington, Groton; and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford

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; 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: Mandy Batty, Assistant Principal Waterford High School; Michael Belden, LEARN Chief Financial & Operations Officer; Kristin Gemaly, Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) Literacy Instructional Coordinator & LEARN LEA President (Teams); Thomas Giard, III, Superintendent of Waterford School District; Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources (Teams); and Kirk Samuelson, Principal Waterford High School

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:** None
- 5. Superintendents' Perspective:** Mr. Thomas Giard, III, Superintendent of Waterford School District; Kirk Samuelson, Principal Waterford High School; and Mandy Batty, Assistant Principal Waterford High School, presented to the board on the Strategic Plan and Key District Initiatives of the district. Superintendent Thomas Giard, III highlighted trends in enrollment, growing diversity, multilingual learners, and the district's focus on addressing chronic absenteeism and supporting all students. Waterford High School Principal Kirk Samuelson and Assistant Principal Mandy Batty shared innovative student-centered programs, including a Student Shadowing Program, where teachers spend a day following students to better understand their experiences, and Learning Walks that involve students and teachers observing classrooms together. These initiatives strengthen teacher-student relationships, promote student voice, and support a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. Data and feedback from these programs guide curriculum, policies, and school practices, helping ensure every student has the resources and support they need to thrive.

6. Consent Agenda:

- 6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—January 8, 2026
- 6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of January 31, 2026
- 6.3 Approval of Grant Applications— None

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

- **Presented by Beverly Washington**
- **Second Dale Bernardoni**
- **Motion passed with 12 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 has 27 current openings, including key administrative roles. The district continues to attract strong candidates, recently hiring a general accountant from a competitive pool of 95 applicants.
- 7.2 Distributions — COST 2026 Legislative Priorities
- 7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—January 23, 2026
- 7.4 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes—January 8, 2026 and January 23, 2026: The LEARN building project is on track and under budget, with costs now projected at \$80–82 million and a \$20 million contingency fund in place for added security.
- 7.5 Legislative Updates: Executive Director Ericson highlighted key funding and legislative issues, including magnet school funding, special education grants, and potential increases to the per-pupil foundation amount. She encouraged families and community members to participate in upcoming hearings, noting that personal engagement, whether in person, online, or via submitted testimony, can make a real impact.
- 7.6 LEARN Agency Updates: Executive Director Ericson shared key mid-year updates, including The mid-year leadership retreat for school leaders, collaboration on a three-year curriculum contract, and \$2.4 million in renovations at the Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS). Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS) and The Friendship School (TFS) were recognized as Schools of Excellence, and high enrollment and family engagement continue across LEARN’s magnet schools. She also highlighted LEARN’s participation in statewide initiatives and programs like Tri-Share, supporting families and shared challenges in education.

8. Old Business: None

9. New Business:

9.1 Fiscal State of the Agency

Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Michael Belden, provided an update on LEARN’s Fiscal State of the Agency for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, highlighting that LEARN’s finances remain strong, with \$54 million in annual revenue and strategic investments in facilities, technology, and student programs. Growth initiatives include cross-school programs, AI-supported learning, early education pilots, and the Teacher Residency Program, all strengthening connections among schools, families, and districts. Large-scale projects, including a \$95 million facility initiative, continue to enhance student experiences and long-term program capacity.

9.2 Office of Teaching and LEARNing Consultant Rates

Discussion of consultant rates in the Office of Teaching and Learning was briefly introduced by Executive Director Ericson and will be revisited at the next board meeting in March. No action was taken at this time.

9.3 Proposed 3% Increase in Creating Connections Tuition

Motion to Approve a 3% increase in the current Creating Connections tuition, raising the rate from \$360.00 to \$371.00 as presented.

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

10. Educational Perspective: None

11. Roundtable Discussion: Student cell phones, AI, and Budget – Board members discussed student cell phone use, the role of AI in schools, and budget considerations. Members also reviewed the electrification of the bus fleet, noting challenges with aging buses, infrastructure needs, and proposed changes to the 2030 statewide requirement. Class size and instructional quality were highlighted as ongoing priorities, with attention to balancing educational needs, special services, and fiscal responsibility.

12. Future Roundtable Topics: Student cell phones, AI, and Budget

13. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 11:27 a.m.

- **Presented by Laurie Wolfley**
- **Second Marijke Kehrhahn**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 8 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

Respectfully submitted by:
Jamella A. A. Etienne

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