



Board of Directors Regular Business

MEETING APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: April 9, 2026

Draft Posted: April 13, 2026

Approved Posted: May 14, 2026

Present: Dale Bernardoni, Chester (Grades K-6); Scott Brown, Lyme - Old Lyme (Region 18); Galen Cawley, Madison (Teams); Dr. Ryan Donlon, LEARN; Katie Gauthier, Stonington (Teams); and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford (Teams)

Not Attending and Not Represented: Eric Bauman, East Lyme; Thomas Danehy, Clinton; Katherine Ericson, LEARN; Jennifer Favalora, Haddam & Killingworth (Region 17); Elizabeth Fernandes, Westbrook; Scott Garbini, New London; A. Terri Garrity, East Haddam; Mary Harris, Ledyard; Nancy Johnston, Essex (Grades K-6); Marijke Kehrhahn, Old Saybrook; Robert Mitchell, Montville; Gregory Perry, Norwich; Chet Stefanowicz, North Stonington; Beverly Washington, Groton; Vacant, Chester, Deep River, Essex/Region (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 & Operations Officer; Brad Columbus, LEARN Principal of Three Rivers Middle College Magnet High School (TRMC); Kristin Gemaly, Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) Literacy Instructional Coordinator & LEARN LEA President (Teams); and Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources

Meeting began at 9:03 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:**

- 4.1 CLA Single Audit Letter: Michael Belden, LEARN Chief Financial & Operations Officer, provided an overview of the annual CLA Single Audit Representation Letter and explained that this is a standard document issued by auditors each year in connection with the review of federal awards programs. The letter confirms that all relevant information and any matters of concern have been disclosed and that the required audit report has been filed. It was noted that the letter is informational in nature and is required regardless of whether any findings are identified.
- 4.2 Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) nomination of Michael Belden for the 2026 Celebrated Connecticut School Business Official Award: Vice Chair Dale Bernardoni extended congratulations to Michael Belden on his recognition. Mr. Belden briefly reflected on the award and the surprise celebration organized in his honor.

Dr. Donlon offered additional commendations, highlighting Mr. Belden’s professionalism, leadership, and strong reputation across the state. He further expressed LEARN’s pride in his accomplishments and recognized the positive impact of his work on the organization and the broader educational community.

- 5. Superintendents’ Perspective:** Mr. Brad Columbus, LEARN Principal of Three Rivers Middle College Magnet High School (TRMC), to present on key initiatives and updates from the high school: Principal Columbus highlighted TRMC’s unique model, which integrates high school and college coursework to better prepare students for postsecondary success. Students have opportunities to earn college credit, engage in rigorous academics, and accelerate their educational pathways.

Principal Columbus emphasized the school’s focus on both academic achievement and the development of essential skills such as independence, self-advocacy, and resilience. Instructional practices are designed to ensure students understand their learning goals and actively track their progress.

He also shared positive student outcomes, noting that graduates pursue a wide range of college and career pathways, often entering higher education with advanced standing. The program continues to serve as an innovative model, supporting student engagement, confidence, and readiness for success beyond high school.

6. Consent Agenda:

- 6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—March 12, 2026
- 6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of March 31, 2026
- 6.3 Approval of Grant Applications—Worker’s Compensation Trust Safety Grant funds projects or initiatives that improve employee safety or reduce risk for workplace injuries. LEARN will implement a multipronged winter safety plan including employee education, enhanced snow and ice management, and provision of safety equipment such as entrance mats and ice grippers, supported by ongoing communication, in the amount of \$13,888.75; and the Title III and the Bilingual sub-grant funds (allocated according to the number of MLs in district as reported on October 1, 2025) help ensure that English learners (ELs) attain English language proficiency and meet state academic standards.

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda made and seconded to approve as presented. Hearing no objections, the consent agenda was approved and the meeting proceeded.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Galen Cawley**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

7. Information from the Executive Director:

- 7.1 Hiring—Resignations and new hires, including trend reports: Associate Executive Director Donlon, on behalf of Executive Director Ericson, and with support from Director of Human Resources Elizabeth McCaffery, provided an update on agency staffing and reviewed current hiring trends, noting a reduction in vacancies from 49 positions at the start of the school year to 27 at present, with remaining openings primarily in specialized and hard-to-fill roles. Ms. McCaffery also reported that 13 positions have already been identified for recruitment for the upcoming school year, helping to clarify anticipated staffing needs. Additionally, Dr. Donlon shared that the recent UCONN recruitment fair was successful, attracting a strong pool of candidates and highlighted the hiring of a bilingual Spanish-speaking teacher for the Puentes program.
- 7.2 Distributions — None
- 7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, Regular Business Meeting—March 27, 2026: Dr. Donlon, supported by Chief Financial and Operations Officer Michael Belden, reported that LEARN completed a \$30 million revolving taxable loan and is in the process of finalizing a \$15 million tax-exempt long-term bond, and also noted that work is ongoing to address a land lease agreement related to Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS) in Groton, with legal counsel coordinating to meet lender requirements. Also highlighted was the EASTCONN/ LEARN Partnership and Practice Conference, which brought together approximately 80 participants. Mr. Belden noted that the event provided an opportunity to showcase LEARN’s support services for partner districts, particularly in areas such as IT and business operations, and that a similar convening is planned for fall.
- 7.4 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes—March 12, 2026 and March 27, 2026: Dr. Donlon reported that the Early LEARNing Magnet School project continues to progress on schedule, with site preparation underway and foundation work expected to begin shortly. LEARN continues coordination with the Town of Waterford regarding public updates and upcoming presentations.
- 7.5 Legislative Updates: Dr. Donlon reported that representatives from the RESC Executive Directors met with Representative Leeper to express appreciation for her continued advocacy on behalf of RESCs and magnet schools. It was noted that the current Appropriations Committee draft of the state budget includes funding for magnet schools, subject to ongoing negotiations, as well as support for the Connecticut Teacher Residency Program (CTRP), reflecting continued attention to initiatives aimed at strengthening and diversifying the educator workforce.

7.6 LEARN Agency Updates: Associate Executive Director Donlon noted that Executive Director Ericson is currently attending the AESA Leadership Academy abroad through mid-April. He shared that recent magnet school lotteries reflect strong interest across LEARN schools, with several programs experiencing high application numbers and continued efforts underway to support enrollment and recruitment, particularly at the middle school level. Additional highlights included a well-attended DisABILITY Summit and ongoing leadership development programming through the Balanced Leadership initiative, which continues to expand its reach to participating districts. Dr. Donlon also referenced continued collaboration with regional partners and successful recruitment-related events aimed at engaging families and prospective students. He concluded by noting ongoing work to update professional evaluation rubrics for service providers, which will be reviewed by committee and brought forward for Board consideration in the coming months.

8. Old Business: None

9. New Business:

9.1 Revised Policy #4129/4229, Personnel-Certified/Non-Certified, Series 4000; "Tuition Reimbursement"

Motion to Approve Revised Policy 4129/4229 Tuition Reimbursement as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Galen Cawley**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.2 Revised Policy #4145/4245, Personnel-Certified/Non-Certified, Series 4000; "Reimbursement for Damaged Personal Property"

Motion to Approve Revised Policy 4145/4254 Reimbursement for Damaged Personal Property as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Galen Cawley**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.3 Establish Nominating Committee for the 2026-2027 Slate of Officers

Motion to approve the following members of the Nominating Committee for the 2026-2027 Slate of Officers: Scott Brown, Jennifer Favalora, Robert Mitchell, Dale Bernardoni, and Beverly Washington

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Galen Cawley**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

9.4 Approve the request for use of the Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS) by MSMHS and SeaGardens Coral & Aquariums on November 14, 2026, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. for the purpose of hosting the Corals of Fall Festival, an educational trade show for coral aquarium hobbyists, from 10:00-4:00 p.m. There will be a \$10 entry fee for visitors and a \$200 table fee for vendors. Proceeds will be used to cover the cost of the event, purchase raffle items, provide transportation for the speakers, and T-shirts for volunteers.

Motion to approve the SeaGardens Coral & Aquariums' use of Marine Science Magnet High School from 8:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., on November 14, 2026, to host the Corals of Fall Festival as presented.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Galen Cawley**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

10. Educational Perspective: None

11. Roundtable Discussion: Regionalized Student Skill Programs, Student cell phones, AI, and Budget: Due to the number of Board members present, the Board voted to postpone the discussion to the May meeting.

Motion made to postpone this discussion to the May meeting.

- **Presented by Scott Brown**
- **Second Galen Cawley**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

12. Future Roundtable Topics: None

13. Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn at 10:28 a.m.

- **Presented by Laurie Wolfley**
- **Second Scott Brown**
- **Motion passed unanimously with 5 votes in favor and 0 votes against**

Respectfully submitted by:
Jamella A. A. Etienne

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Meeting ID: 263 794 849 985 0
Passcode: Yu6kE7rG