



LEARN BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING – APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: September 10, 2026

Draft Posted: September 14, 2026

Approved Posted: October 14, 2026

Present: Dale Bernardoni, Chester (Grades K-6); Katherine Ericson, LEARN; Jennifer Favalora, Haddam & Killingworth (Region 17); Elizabeth Fernandes, Westbrook; Katie Gauthier, Stonington (TEAMS); Marijke Kehrhahn, Old Saybrook; Robert Mitchell, Montville; Beverly Washington, Groton (Teams); and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford

Not Attending and Not Represented: Eric Bauman, East Lyme; Scott Brown, Lyme - Old Lyme (Region 18); Galen Cawley, Madison; Thomas Danehy, Clinton; Scott Garbini, New London; Terri Garrity, East Haddam; Mary Harris, Ledyard; Gregory Perry, Norwich; Chet Stefanowicz, North Stonington; Vacant, Chester, Deep River, Essex/Region (Region 4, Grades 7-12); Vacant, Deep River (Grades K-6); Vacant, East Hampton; Vacant, Essex (Grades K-6); Vacant, Guilford; Vacant, Preston; and Vacant, Salem

Guests: Tara Amatrudo, LEARN Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS) Principal; Elizabeth Ayala, LEARN Teacher of the Year; Michael Belden, LEARN Chief Financial & Operations Officer; Dr. Ryan Donlon, LEARN Associate Executive Director; Kristin Gemaly, Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) Literacy Instructional Coordinator & LEARN LEA President (Teams); Cynthia Gluck, LEARN Paraeducator of the Year; Bridgette Gordon-Hickey, LEARN Deputy Executive Director; Amy LeQuire, LEARN Director Of Behavioral Programs; Joanne Lund, LEARN Assistant Director of Business; and Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources

Meeting began at 9:01 a.m.

AGENDA

- 1 CALL TO ORDER: PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
- 2 AUDIENCE AND GUESTS: INTRODUCTIONS
- 3 PUBLIC COMMENT

**Request Motion to move agenda item 9.1 Recognition of LEARN's 2026 Teacher and Para Educator of the Year to precede regular business meeting agenda items.*

Motion to move agenda item 9.1 Teacher and Para Educator of the Year to precede agenda item 4

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

4 READING AND/OR REVIEW OF CORRESPONDENCE

4.1 Receipt of the independent audit engagement letter confirming the engagement to audit the financial statements of LEARN's governmental activities, each major fund, and the aggregate remaining fund information for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026.

4.2 LEARN - Educator and Leader Evaluation and Support Plan 2026-2027 Checklist Submission.

5 SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – Dr. Ryan Donlon, LEARN Associate Executive Director, to present on the 2026-2027 SY opening of LEARN Magnet Schools.

Per Dr. Donlon's report, LEARN continues its transition toward operating as a family of schools and is in the second year of a three-year grade-level restructuring, with The Friendship School (TFS) expanding to pre-K through grade 1 and the Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) expanding through grade 7. The long-term plan is to establish a connected pathway from TFS through RMMS and into Marine Science Magnet High School (MSMHS). Dr. Donlon reported strong enrollment interest, continued federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) funding, and positive academic and school climate outcomes across LEARN schools. He highlighted new curriculum development, reductions in behavioral incidents, strong graduation and college-credit outcomes, and increased participation in culture and climate surveys. TFS and MSMHS were also recognized as National Magnet Schools of Excellence.

School-based priorities for 2026-2027 include supporting grade-level transitions, strengthening curriculum and instructional practices, expanding project-based and multicultural learning, continuing development of the Puentes Dual-Language Program, and strengthening student agency, self-direction, and academic discourse. LEARN is also continuing work in literacy, numeracy, social-emotional learning, executive functioning, and multi-tiered systems of support. Agencywide initiatives include transition planning, school leader development, middle school design, an emerging artificial intelligence practice group, and continued leadership development through the Germán Group. Dr. Donlon noted that lessons learned from the first year of grade-level transitions have resulted in more comprehensive planning and communication processes, contributing to a smoother transition this school year.

Dr. Donlon concluded by highlighting LEARN's efforts to provide increased opportunities for student clubs, activities, and leadership experiences during the school day in response to transportation challenges affecting after-school programming.

6 CONSENT AGENDA

- 6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting of June 11, 2026
- 6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of August 31, 2026
- 6.3 Approval of Grant Applications: None

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

- **Presented by Dale Bernardoni**
- **Second Jennifer Favalora**
- **Motion passed unanimously 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 reported that all LEARN certified positions are currently filled, noting recruitment success of bilingual educators.

7.2 Distributions

7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

7.3.1 [Special Business Meeting of July 24, 2026](#)

7.3.2 [Regular Business Meeting of August 28, 2026](#)

7.4 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes

7.4.1 [Regular Business Meeting of June 26, 2026](#)

7.4.2 [Supplemental Business Meeting of July 9, 2026](#)

7.4.3 [Regular Business Meeting of July 24, 2026](#)

7.4.4 [Supplemental Business Meeting of August 13, 2026](#)

7.4.5 [Regular Business Meeting of August 28, 2026](#)

7.5 Legislative Updates: LEARN continues its state and federal advocacy Efforts through engagement with legislators, policymakers, and regional education leaders regarding the role of Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) and their regional special education programs. LEARN recently hosted tours for state representatives and regional superintendents to highlight its regional special education services and broader role in supporting local school districts. LEARN also participated in a state Blue Ribbon Commission focused on pre-K through grade 12 education, with

discussions addressing regional service models and opportunities for collaboration and efficiency in areas such as business operations, information technology, and human resources. The Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, and Associate Executive Director will participate in an upcoming visit to Washington, D.C., hosted by the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) in September.

- 7.6 LEARN Agency Updates: LEARN recently held its annual administrative retreat, with a new format focused on strengthening collaboration, relationships among its administrators, textured leadership, and developing a deeper understanding of the experiences of students, staff, and families. A new nursing supervision partnership has been established with Madison Public Schools, increasing the total number of district partnerships; LEARN is celebrating its 60th anniversary kicking off the new school year with convocation leadership visits to individual schools and programs; and the annual Disability Conference will be held March 20 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Mystic Marriott Hotel & Spa in Groton.

8 OLD BUSINESS

9 NEW BUSINESS

- 9.1 Recognition of LEARN's 2026 Teacher and Para Educator of the Year

- 9.2 Community-based Organizations Report: LEARN has four current contracts with community-based organizations providing services across schools and programs. Community partners include the Child & Family Agency, Thames

Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA), and Carelot Children's Center.

- 9.3 Workforce Development Report: LEARN currently boasts ten programs, 17 Organizations, and approximately 288 students in a variety of workforce development experiences, including apprenticeships, career exploration, in-school training, internships, and other work-based learning opportunities, such as students working in food preparation, retail and donation centers, packaging, and veterinary technology and phlebotomy certification courses. In partnership with the University of Connecticut, LEARN is developing an assessment tool to help identify student preferences and satisfaction with different employment experiences, particularly for students with limited communication skills. LEARN has also established a new nursing supervision contract with Madison Public Schools, representing the agency's fourth nursing supervision partnership.
- 9.4 Staff Attrition Report: Executive Director Ericson reviewed trends among certified and non-certified staff. LEARN continues to focus on staff retention through professional growth opportunities, career pathways, compensation and benefits, and efforts to strengthen workplace culture and climate.

10 EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

11 ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

12 FUTURE ROUNDTABLE TOPICS: Technology use, artificial intelligence (AI) in schools, cashless payment systems, and preschool expansion.

13 ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn meeting at 10:40 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