LEARN BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING – APPROVED MINUTES

Meeting Date: October 8, 2026
Draft Posted: October 14, 2026
Approved Posted: November 16, 2026

Present: Dale Bernardoni, Chester (Grades K-6); Galen Cawley, Madison (Teams); Courtney Ennis, Preston (Teams); Katherine Ericson, LEARN; Jennifer Favalora, Haddam & Killingworth (Region 17); Elizabeth Fernandes, Westbrook; Mary Harris, Ledyard (Teams); Robert Mitchell, Montville; and Laurie Wolfley, Waterford (Teams)

Not Attending and Not Represented: Eric Bauman, East Lyme; Thomas Danehy, Clinton; Scott Garbini, New London; Terri Garrity, East Haddam; Katie Gauthier, Stonington; Marijke Kehrhahn, Old Saybrook; 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, Essex (Grades K-6); Vacant, Guilford; and Vacant, Salem

Guests: Dr. Paul Freeman, Superintendent of Guilford Public Schools; Joanne Lund, LEARN Assistant Director of Business; Elizabeth McCaffery, LEARN Director of Human Resources (Teams); Sarah Moon, LEARN Director of Special Services; and Adrenna Paolillo, LEARN Assistant Director

Meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

AGENDA

1 CALL TO ORDER: PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2 AUDIENCE AND GUESTS: INTRODUCTIONS

3 PUBLIC COMMENT

4 READING AND/OR REVIEW OF CORRESPONDENCE

4.1 Resignation of Board Member W. Scott Brown from the Board of Education of Regional School District 18, effective September 30, 2026.

4.2 Notice of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Operations Grant Award

5 SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – Dr. Paul Freeman, Superintendent of Guilford Public Schools, to present on the Strategic Plan and Key District Initiatives of the district.

Dr. Freeman presented an overview of Guilford district priorities, student needs, and ongoing strategic initiatives. He discussed the district's academic performance, budget considerations, and commitment to community engagement and continuous improvement, highlighting current efforts to promote student well-being through updated personal device policies, and a more developmentally appropriate approach to classroom technology use.

Dr. Freeman also reviewed the district's ongoing evaluation of artificial intelligence in education, including its potential benefits, challenges, and implications for teaching and learning. Throughout the presentation, Dr. Freeman emphasized the importance of balancing instructional effectiveness, student engagement, financial considerations, and community expectations while ensuring that technology supports, rather than replaces, meaningful teaching and learning.

6 CONSENT AGENDA

6.1 Approval of the DRAFT Minutes, Regular Business Meeting of September 10, 2026

6.2 Approval of Budget Summary as of September 30, 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): The administration continues to pursue recruitment and retention strategies, particularly in paraprofessional and other non-certified positions, to address vacancies and maintain staffing levels necessary to support students.

7.2 Distributions:

7.2.1 Executive Director Ericson OpEd: Regional Cooperation in Southeastern CT

Executive Director Ericson discussed her recent op-ed published in *CT Mirror*, recognizing the first anniversary of the Regional Performance Incentive Program (RPIP) grant and the progress made through regional collaboration. She noted that the piece supports broader efforts to increase public awareness of the role and impact of Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). Administration will continue to explore opportunities to highlight successful partnerships and the benefits of regional collaboration for schools and students.

7.3 Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

7.3.1 Regular Business Meeting of September 25, 2026

7.4 The LEARN Project, Inc. Meeting Minutes

7.4.1 Annual Regular Business Meeting of September 25, 2026

Executive Director Ericson provided the Board with an annual update on The LEARN Project, Inc., LEARN's nonprofit entity, including its role in administering designated funding and supporting related financial activities. She reviewed the organization's primary funding responsibilities and emphasized the importance of maintaining accurate financial records and documentation to support transparency, accountability, and continuity.

7.5 LEARN Building Committee Meeting Minutes

7.5.1 Supplemental Business Meeting of September 10, 2026

7.5.2 Regular Business Meeting of September 25, 2026

7.6 Legislative Updates: Executive Director Ericson provided a legislative update following participation in the AESA Advocacy in Action Conference. Key topics included potential changes to federal education funding and programs, the administration of federal education responsibilities, and the need to strengthen student data privacy protections in response to emerging technologies. LEARN will continue to monitor federal developments and participate in advocacy efforts addressing issues affecting schools, students, and educational organizations.

7.7 LEARN Agency Updates: Executive Director Ericson provided updates on statewide and regional initiatives, including educator evaluation and support, regional listening sessions with district leadership, and ongoing partnerships with higher education institutions to expand professional learning and regional programming opportunities. She attended the opening of Groton's new early childhood education center and LEARN continues to participate in statewide discussions regarding the future of educational services and regional collaboration. The Board also received an update on the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) universal school meals program, which demonstrated increased meal participation during implementation. The early

results are encouraging and will help inform ongoing efforts to support student access to meals and assess the program's long-term sustainability.

8 OLD BUSINESS: None

9 NEW BUSINESS

9.1 Updated Drone Footage: Early LEARNing Magnet School Project 9/8/26

10 EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: Sarah Moon, LEARN Director of Special Services, and Adrenna Paolillo, LEARN Assistant Director, to present an overview and update on Local Governance Partnerships (LGP).

Assistant Director Adrenna Paolillo presented an overview of Local Governance Partnerships and LEARN's role in supporting regional early childhood services. The presentation highlighted the transition to the state's Early Start Connecticut framework and the importance of regional coordination in addressing the needs of children and families. Adrenna reviewed LEARN's support for three Local Governance Partnerships, including fiscal oversight, community needs assessments, program coordination, and collaboration among early childhood providers and community partners. Recent assessment findings are informing local planning and funding priorities, with attention to access to early childhood services and the broader needs of families. The presentation concluded with an overview of ongoing efforts to strengthen regional partnerships, promote consistent practices while addressing local priorities, and support coordinated early childhood services.

11 ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: The Board discussed student personal device policies across districts, including approaches to restricting cellphone use during the school day. Members shared observations regarding implementation, student compliance, parent communication, and the importance of consistent expectations. The Board noted that districts will continue to monitor the effectiveness of their policies and make adjustments as needed.

The discussion also addressed the use of educational technology in schools and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning and academic progress. Members emphasized the importance of reviewing student performance data and continuing efforts to support academic recovery.

12 FUTURE ROUNDTABLE TOPICS – Budget planning and fiscal challenges; School facilities and long-term capital planning: and District experiences with school consolidation and redistricting.

13 ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn meeting at 10:41 a.m.

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

Respectfully submitted by:

Jamella A. A. Etienne