



BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
January 8, 2026

MINUTES

On January 8, 2026, the EdAdvance Board of Directors held a Zoom online meeting during which a quorum was present. President John Kissko called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM and recorded the following members in attendance:

1. Roll Call:

Name (District): Joseph Abdella, Region 12
Deb Bell, Region 7
Kate Conetta, Danbury
Christine Faressa, Watertown
John Kissko, Torrington
Sarah Robichaud, Colebrook

**EdAdvance
Personnel:**

Jonathan P. Costa, Sr., Executive Director
Lisa Bowden, Assistant Executive Director
Richard Carmelich, III, Chief Operations Officer
Tracey Lay, Chief Talent & Development Officer
Annette Miserez-Dillon, Director of Special Education
Carol Montory, Board Clerk
Judy Palmer, Director of School Climate & Mental Health
Fran Amara, School Climate Coaching Specialist

2. Approval of November 6, 2025 Minutes

Upon a motion by Kate Conetta, duly seconded by Deb Bell, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the November 6, 2025 meeting.

3. Questions and Comments from the Public: None

4. Communications

a) Written

Jonathan spoke about the minutes from the December 1st meeting of the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology. They invited Jonathan to speak at their meeting about the work with Artificial Intelligence that EdAdvance is doing statewide.

5. Old Business: None

6. New Business:

a) Presentation: School Climate Policy – *Judy Palmer and Fran Amara*

Judy Palmer, EdAdvance Director of School Climate and Mental Health and Fran Amara, EdAdvance School Climate Coaching Specialist provided an overview of the new Connecticut school climate legislation and the organizational support available to districts as they transition to these proactive standards. The new legislation marks a shift in Connecticut's school climate policy from reactive measures to proactive strategies aimed at enhancing student achievement and mental well-being. Defined as the quality of the school environment, school climate encompasses relationships, teaching practices, and organizational structures that deeply influence everyone in the community. To meet new legislative requirements, school boards must have adopted a School Climate Policy and a Restorative Practices Response Policy by July 1, 2025, while also appointing dedicated School Climate Coordinators and Climate Specialists for each school. Districts are further required to develop comprehensive School Climate Improvement Plans based on survey data and committee recommendations, with first submissions due by December 31, 2025. To support this transition, EdAdvance provides extensive professional development, data analysis for surveys, and is partnering with the State Department of Education to co-develop guidance tools and pilot these standards in 15 schools across the state.

b) Appointment: Board of Directors Vice President

Jonathan received an email from Roxy Fainer, our Thomaston Board member, that she was stepping down from both the Board and her role as Board Vice President. Jonathan reached out to our Danbury Board member, Kate Conetta, and she graciously agreed to serve in that position.

Upon a motion by Deb Bell, duly seconded by Joseph Abdella, the Board unanimously approved the appointment of Kate Conetta as Board of Directors Vice President.

c) Action Item: Head Start Non-Federal Share Waiver

Upon a motion by Sarah Robichaud, duly seconded by Deb Bell, the Board of Directors approve of EdAdvance's Head Start: Prenatal to Five programs proposed waiver request for the FY25 Head Start/Early Head Start. The motion passed unanimously.

d) Action Item: Head Start Governance, Leadership, and Oversight Capacity Screener

Upon motion by Kate Conetta, duly seconded by Joseph Abdella, the Board of Directors approve of EdAdvance's Head Start: Prenatal to Five program's Governance, Leadership and Oversight Capacity Screening. The motion passed unanimously.

e) Action Item: Head Start Health and Safety Screener for Each Site

Upon motion by Christine Faressa, duly seconded by Joseph Abdella, the Board of Directors approve of EdAdvance's Head Start: Prenatal to Five program's Health and Safety Screener. The motion passed unanimously.

f) Announcement of the Completion and Posting of our Agency Annual Indoor Air Quality Surveys

Rich spoke about the state mandated air quality requirements for school districts. Each school district must complete an annual inspection and evaluation of their indoor air quality in each school building and an inspection and evaluation of the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) once every five years. The air quality surveys for our school buildings are complete, and

the results were included in the Board of Directors information packet emailed to members prior to today's meeting.

7. Reports/Updates:

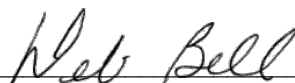
- a) Special Education – *Annette Miserez-Dillon*
 - Annette spoke about the 2nd Annual Training Mock Traffic Stop for individuals with autism, a collaborative event with the University Pathways Program, a partnership between Post University and EdAdvance, and local police departments. This program is designed to help drivers on the autism spectrum learn how to interact with law enforcement during a traffic stop in a supportive environment, while also providing police officers with essential training on how to effectively communicate with individuals with autism.
 - Our schools provided support to students and families throughout the holiday season. Recognizing that this time can be stressful for some students, our dedicated staff focused on fostering a sense of normalcy and stability.
 - In December, our staff completed the new school climate survey, and we used the data to help each principal develop a school improvement plan.
- b) Talent and Development – *Tracey Lay*
 - Tracey reported that the agency is providing Human Resources support to Region 9 and Marketing and Communications support to Region 15.
 - Our Early Childhood and Family Program department received a \$100,000 grant from Thrive from the Start to support prenatal to three children facing homelessness.
 - The agency's Winter Brunch will be held on January 30 from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm. Our Food Services department will be providing the food.
 - We are holding a Stock the Shelves food drive for our partners at the United Way of Northwest Connecticut.
 - A Red Cross blood drive is being held on January 22 from 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm at the Litchfield office. It is open to staff and the community.
 - We received a bonus grant to provide health and wellness opportunities for staff. In addition to our yoga classes, we will also be holding a drawing for staff of up to \$50 toward any health/wellness activity of the winner's choice.
- c) Business and Operations – *Richard Carmelich*
 - Rich reported that it is the first time since Covid that our auditors have completed the audit by the deadline. We will present it at the February Board meeting.
 - Our transportation collaborative remains successful, having provided updated rates to the districts and continuing to hold quarterly meetings.
 - Our Technology department collaborated with the CT Military Department on IT Security, and they will be having an Incident Response workshop on January 12 to assist our districts.
 - We had been providing complimentary space at the Regional Learning Center for the Torrington Transition Program, which vacated the space over the winter break. Beginning July 1, the Highlander Transition Program, a collaboration between Shared Services and Region 7, will move into the space and begin paying rent.
 - With renewed interest in Workspace, we will need to relocate some Birth to Three and Early Childhood staff who are still working in the building. We are currently exploring several office space options to accommodate their needs.
 - The Northwest Hills Council of Governments, who currently rent space in our building, is seeking to expand. We are actively exploring available space within the building to accommodate their needs.
 - Our electric vehicle charging stations project is still in progress. We've successfully cleared the Eversource requirements and are now awaiting updated contract revisions from our installation vendor, ECS. We anticipate completing the installation by March.

- d) Professional Learning Services – *Lisa Bowden*
- Lisa reported that the Professional Learning Services team continues to provide Curriculum and Instruction, Math, Social Studies, Science, English Learners and TEAM support to our districts.
 - We continue to work with the School Climate department, adding instructional practice.
 - Most of the Professional Learning consultants have completed the EdAdvance Artificial Intelligence microcredential.
 - Lisa shared that she sent an email to our district’s assistant superintendents to schedule meetings aimed at having meaningful conversations about how we can better support their needs.
- e) Executive Director’s Report – *Jonathan P. Costa, Sr.*
- Jonathan reported that he is actively pursuing two potential funding sources for our School-Based Mental Health Grant. He is advocating to the Governor’s office for \$800,000 from the state’s \$500 million rainy day fund to cover operations for the rest of this year. Additionally, we’ve learned that our organization is part of a lawsuit challenging the Department of Education’s attempt to revoke previously approved mental health program grants. A federal judge has since issued a permanent injunction. Following this decision, we received notification of \$147,000 in additional funding to cover the period from January 1 to February 6. However, this amount is not sufficient to sustain the program, and we are currently awaiting further clarification from the U.S. Department of Education.
 - Lowering the sale price for Workspace has generated renewed interest in the property. We currently have a \$2.5 million offer, compared to the original asking price of \$3.2 million. In addition, the prospective buyer has committed to making \$300,000 in donations to be split between us and CES. The sale would be immediate, with no inspections or due diligence required.
 - The RESC Alliance invited eight statewide educational organizations, CABA, CAPSS, and others, to a meeting to discuss strategic priorities moving forward.
 - Region 10 has expressed an interest in transferring to our RESC region from CREC. They will present this for a vote at their Board meeting in January and approve it at a meeting in February. After receiving clarification from the CSDE’s attorney, we need to have a majority of our district’s Boards of Education approve the transfer.
 - We finally received notification that we will be receiving the Employee Retention Tax Credit of \$4.6 million, but it will take 3 to 6 months to process the check. The funds have been accumulating interest, so we should receive an additional \$400,000, which will cover the cost of the broker. When we receive these funds, we will give staff a retroactive 2% raise. We will also proceed with the plan to tear down the church on Grove Street in Torrington. The contractor is charging \$329,000 to tear it down, take away the debris, and create a parking lot.
 - Jonathan shared that he sent an email to our districts that do not have a representative on our Board, asking them to consider appointing a representative.
 - Our Grant Writer, Abby Peklo, has officially changed her name to Abby Rose.

8. Adjournment

Upon a motion by Kate Conetta, duly seconded by Joseph Abdella, the meeting was adjourned at 5:14 PM.

Minutes recorded by:
Carol Montory, Board Clerk



Deb Bell, Secretary