



BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
May 7, 2026

MINUTES

On May 7, 2026, the EdAdvance Board of Directors held a meeting during which a quorum was present. Vice President Kate Conetta called the meeting to order at 5:37 PM and recorded the following members in attendance:

1. Roll Call:

Name (District): Joseph Abdella, Region 12
Deb Bell, Region 7
Kate Conetta, Danbury
Sarah Ethier, Thomaston
Christine Faressa, Watertown
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

2. Approval of April 2, 2026 Minutes

Upon a motion by Sarah Robichaud, duly seconded by Deb Bell, the Board unanimously approved the minutes of the April 2, 2026 meeting.

3. Questions and Comments from the Public: None

4. Old Business: None

5. New Business:

a) Presentation/Approval: Proposed Agency Budget for FY 2026-2027

Jonathan shared a PowerPoint presentation overview of the FY 2026-2027 budget proposal. EdAdvance is currently in a strong fiscal position, with agency reserves returning to pre-pandemic levels and the current year's budget projected to outperform expectations. This stability has

allowed for the delivery of a promised 2% retroactive COLA to staff, even as we face a more than 5% increase in health insurance costs. Key financial milestones include the finalized sale of WorkspaceCT, the receipt of IRS funds, the receipt of funding to continue the School Based Mental Health grant through 2027 and securing \$900,000 in state funding for the College and Career Accelerator. While most programs are stable, the agency is monitoring a growing deficit in Food Services, which will likely necessitate future price increases. Additionally, we expect the Special Education budget to improve and we remain committed to maintaining all four associated programs for the foreseeable future.

We are planning for a more responsive organizational framework, based on a number of external challenges our districts are facing. Central to this plan is the creation of a new “Learning Intelligence” division, which will combine our Professional Learning and Skills21/Artificial Intelligence teams into a leaner, more sustainable group. This consolidation includes a reduction of 2 FTEs to ensure revenue and expenses are properly aligned. The Extended Leadership Team will be holding a retreat in June to further explore these adjustments and refine the agency’s responsive framework.

We recently added five new Board members and Region 10 has become one of our member districts. Major infrastructure projects coming up include: a grant application, supported by Senator Murphy’s office, to rehabilitate the rectory into housing for early childhood educators; the required removal of the Litchfield office’s underground oil tank and the conversion of the heating system to propane; the installation of 10 high speed EV charging stations at three locations paid for by a grant from OPM; the progression of church demolition plans to expand early childhood parking; the potential relocation of the COG from the first to the third floor; and the construction of a memorial picnic area dedicated to Nancy Luchene at the back of the building.

Upon motion by Christine Faressa, duly seconded by Deb Bell, the Board of Directors unanimously approved the FY 2026-2027 budget as presented.

b) Presentation/Approval: FY 2026-2027 COLA Increase

Jonathan shared a PowerPoint slide about the agency COLA for FY 2026-2027. Based on the presented budget, a 2% Cost of Living Adjustment for eligible staff was recommended to the Board.

Upon a motion by Joseph Abdella, duly seconded by Christine Faressa, the Board of Directors unanimously approved the COLA for FY 2026-2027 as presented.

c) Presentation/Election: Slate of Officers for FY 2026-2027

Jonathan presented the slate of officers as follows:

President: John Kissko

Vice-President: Kate Conetta

Secretary: Deb Bell

Treasurer: Joseph Abdella

Member at Large: Sarah Robichaud

Upon a motion by Sarah Robichaud, duly seconded by Christine Faressa, the Board of Directors unanimously approved the slate of officers for FY 2026-2027 as presented.

d) Presentation: EdAdvance Scholarship Winners

Jonathan reported that we received 118 applications for our four \$1,500 scholarships.

The northern region scholarship winners are:

- Sofia Barbagallo, Watertown High School, is undecided about her college choice, but intends to study Biology Pre-Med. Her essay was about her volunteering at the soup kitchen, especially

during holidays, and understanding that treating those in need with respect and dignity is as important as sharing food.

- Drew Fowler, Terryville High School, will be attending Yale University to study Mathematics. His essay was about his volunteering at the Terryville Country Fair and founding "Drew's Walk of Gold," which raised \$16,000 for pediatric care, and honoring those who supported him during his own childhood cancer battle by creating moments of joy for others.

The southern region scholarship winners are:

- Delaney Breitbeil, New Fairfield High School, will be attending Fairfield University to study Nursing. Her essay was about serving as student coordinator for her school's American Red Cross blood drive, to honor her aunt who survived childhood cancer thanks to donated blood.
- Stephen Mammola, Newtown High School, will be attending the University of Tampa to study Sports Management. His essay was about creating and expanding the Newtown HS floor hockey program, impacting students across the state.

6. Reports/Updates:

a) Special Education – *Annette Miserez-Dillon*

- Annette reported that during March students started taking the required state testing assessments and SAT preparation. There was a mix of student enthusiasm and apprehension.
- Annette and Seamus are mentoring our school principals through the budget process, some of whom are navigating the process for the first time, to develop a forward-looking budget. Two schools are maintaining healthy budgets while the other two face challenges due to lower enrollment. Despite outstanding referrals, the strategic priority remains teacher retention, emphasizing that staffing stability is essential regardless of fluctuating class sizes.

b) Talent and Development – *Tracey Lay*

- Tracey reported that the Adult Education department in conjunction with the CT Department of Labor held a successful career fair on April 24th with a great employer turnout.
- Human Resources is busy managing the upcoming open enrollment and has upgraded all summer and academic employment letters to an electronic format.
- The Marketing and Communications department is currently working on migration and redesign of the Region 12 website.
- Recent staff recognition efforts included Early Childhood Appreciation Week and a week-long celebration for after-school professionals.
- Our agency Summer Fun Food Truck Fest is planned for May 22 featuring three food trucks, yard games, and dedication of our new picnic area in memory of Nancy Luchene, a 35-year employee who recently passed away.
- All Agency Day is scheduled for Wednesday, August 19th, featuring a Webstore 4.0 for staff to purchase agency branded gear.
- Our health and wellness focus for staff includes yoga, Zumba, and a \$50 "Wellness Wednesday" incentive.
- An American Red Cross community blood drive event is scheduled for the Litchfield office on June 3rd from 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm as part of a thrice-yearly initiative.

c) Business and Operations – *Richard Carmelich*

- Rich spoke about the agency's 5-year capital plan that was included in the Board information packet. The plan includes several small scale projects that have been previously deferred due to financial constraints. The largest expense would be converting the rectory building in Torrington into six apartments for early childhood educators, but we will only do this if we receive the federal grant to cover the cost. New windows at Partnership Learning Academy are required to replace single-pane wood frame windows that currently have termite damage. At RLC we need to add rooftop propane tanks and piping for the rooftop heating units. Four classrooms at the RLC need to be finished after previously being left untouched during the

- renovation. New carpeting is planned for two meeting rooms in the Litchfield office. The goal is to complete a few projects this summer, though some remain deferred based on the budget.
- Food Services expects \$30,000 in additional revenue from the free school breakfast program. We have added Sherman School district to our service list, and this will also help improve the bottom line.
 - The Finance department is currently focused on reporting at both the state and federal levels.
 - The IT department is preparing for a significant amount of work scheduled for the summer.
- d) Professional Learning Services – *Lisa Bowden*
- Lisa reported that LEAP continues to be steady with a contract secured for next year, and EdAdvance taking on the role of fiscal manager.
 - Demand for elementary-grade math support is exceptionally high, with Robin Moore, Professional Learning specialist, already booking professional development trainings into next year.
 - The RESC Alliance submitted a \$300,000 proposal to the Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities (ODRD) in response to an RFP. The CSDE is seeking a contractor to develop, refine, and implement rigorous audit procedures and compliance measures for 18 Connecticut educator preparation programs to ensure their literacy and dyslexia training aligns with state statutes and national accreditation standards.
 - Lisa has concluded her meetings with Assistant Superintendents and the focus is shifting toward resource sharing. The goal is to connect small school districts to a wider network to reduce costs and provide customized, lower-cost services.
 - The department is losing two staff members due to low demand for their specific roles.
 - There is a consolidated effort to work more closely with Special Education and AI staff moving forward.
- e) Executive Director's Report – *Jonathan P. Costa, Sr.*
- Jonathan provided his updates during the proposed agency budget presentation and had nothing further to add.

7. Executive Session – Discussion of Executive Director's Evaluation

Upon a motion by Joseph Abdella, duly seconded by Sarah Robichaud, the meeting was adjourned to Executive Session at 6:47 PM and invited Jonathan Costa to join them to discuss the Executive Director's evaluation and contract.

The meeting was declared out of Executive Session.

8. Adjournment

With nothing further to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes recorded by:
Carol Montory, Board Clerk



Deb Bell, Secretary