New Milford Board of Education
Committee on Learning Meeting Motions and Minutes
November 4, 2026
Sarah Noble Intermediate School Library Media Center

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NEW MILFORD, CT

Present:	Mrs. Sarah Herring, Chairperson Mr. Joseph Failla Mrs. Tammy McInerney
Also Present:	Dr. Janet Parlato, Superintendent of Schools Ms. Holly Hollander, Assistant Superintendent Mrs. Kristen Phillips, PK-5 Supervisor Special Education Dr. Kimberly Culkin, Director of Student Services
Absent:	

1.	**Call to Order** The meeting of the New Milford Board of Education Committee on Learning was called to order at 6:30 pm by Mrs. Sarah Herring.	**Call to Order** The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.
2.	**Public Comment** None	**Public Comment** None
3.	**Items of Information**	**Items of Information**
A.	**Update on PreK Excel: Connecticut Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS) to monitor the development of our youngest learners.** Ms. Hollander stated that the focus for the evening was on student achievement for early learners, emphasizing that early learning years are essential for stronger academic outcomes and fewer interventions. Dr. Culkin added that Excel provides free early learning education for children with disabilities under the IDEA Act. New Milford Public Schools provides inclusive, free school services for students beginning at age 3. Due to strong community interest in the program, parents of students without disabilities pay a small tuition fee for Excel. Ms. Hollander stated that early learners learn best when engaged in real-world activities, which help build problem-solving, communication, curiosity, and social skills. Dr. Culkin explained that early learning standards from birth to age 5 cover eight domains to guide intentional, play-based learning: cognition, social-emotional	**A. Update on PreK Excel: Connecticut Documentation and Observation for Teaching System (CT DOTS) to monitor the development of our youngest learners.**

	development, physical health, creative arts, science, mathematics, social studies, and language/literacy. Ms. Hollander noted that early learning skills build upon one another using Connecticut state standards and assessment tools. The district is currently engaged with the CT DOTS assessment framework, training teachers on its navigation and reporting data to the State Office of Early Childhood. She added that because not all children attend accredited programs prior to kindergarten, students enter with varying levels of readiness. In response to an inquiry from Mrs. McInerney regarding tracking Excel students into kindergarten, Ms. Hollander explained that efforts are underway to build consistency and common experiences across all classrooms. Mrs. McInerney noted this helps prepare students for kindergarten despite Excel being a half-day program. Mrs. Phillips highlighted the program's holistic approach, mentioning that Excel teachers intentionally plan daily lessons to identify focus areas and create cohesive units of study to assist struggling students and offer home support strategies for parents. Ms. Hollander noted that some students remain in the Excel program for up to three years depending on their birthdates. Dr. Culkin confirmed that peers are selected via lottery and screened to ensure they can serve as appropriate peer role models. Mr. Failla asked if real-time data is collected on classroom progression. Mrs. Phillips confirmed that teachers meet regularly to discuss student performance and progress. Mrs. McInerney observed that as the special needs student population increases, classrooms should maintain an equal balance of special education students and peer role models.	
B.	**Performance Workshop Next Steps** Dr. Parlato outlined district efforts to boost student achievement using standard-aligned curriculum taught with fidelity across subjects and grade levels.	**B. Performance Workshop Next Steps**

	For Grades K–5 ELA, the district expanded Science of Reading materials via Bookworms. Responding to Mrs. Herring regarding phonics, Ms. Hollander explained that Heggerty and UFLi were kept based on teacher preference, using DIBELS and nonsense word assessments to track decoding progress. Mrs. Herring noted assessments must align with instruction. To address declining performance in Grades 6–8 ELA, teachers are collaborating with a University of Delaware consultant to create a written curriculum aligned with CT Core Standards. Ms. Hollander noted this provides standardized tools so teachers avoid creating materials in isolation. In High School ELA, work is underway to remove skill overlap between English 1 and 2. Addressing Mrs. McInerney's question, Ms. Hollander explained that departments are now collaborating directly. Dr. Parlato also noted new Sheltered English 1 and Academic Reading courses for 9th graders needing foundational literacy support. In Math, elementary grades are in Year 4 of iReady Math paired with WIN blocks. Grades 6–8 are in Year 2 of Savvas, supported by EdAdvance consulting. For Grades 9–10, Math Lab courses use data to place students needing numeracy support. For Science (Grades 6–12), ongoing work focuses on aligning coursework with NGSS standards using OpenSciEd materials. In Special Education, curriculum updates target Learning Strategies courses in Grades 9–10 to foster study skills and independence. Self-contained reading and math programs use adapted Bookworms materials, with plans to expand to higher grades. Regarding Early Childhood, Dr. Parlato noted 80%–81% of incoming kindergarteners enter below benchmark reading levels. Addressing Mrs. Herring's caution against overly academic Pre-K programming, Dr. Parlato confirmed the framework remains play-based. Revised templates across all levels incorporate the Portrait of a Lifelong Learner framework. Addressing questions on iReady assessments, Ms. Hollander confirmed assessment items will be tailored to student levels, while Dr. Parlato noted state rules mandate progress monitoring three times a year.	

	Ms. Hollander concluded by emphasizing that professional development and curriculum resources are chosen to maintain fiscal responsibility while addressing district needs.	
4.	**Public Comment** None	**Public Comment** None
5.	**Adjourn** *Mrs. McInerney moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:21pm., seconded by Mr. Failla and passed unanimously.*	**Adjourn** Motion made and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Sarah E Herring

Sarah Herring, Chairperson
Committee on Learning