

**Executive Board**

**President**

Terry Brandon, ESD 123

**President Elect**

Dale McDaniel, CRESO 113

**Members**

June Sine	NEWESD 101
James Sebree	ESD 105
Darlene Stickel	ESD 112
Dale McDaniel	CRESO 113
Ann Byrnes	OESD 114
Mehret	
Tekle-Awarun	PSESD 121
Terry Brandon	ESD 123
Marcia Henkle	NCESD 171
Merle Kirkley	NWESD 189

**Superintendents**

Rob Roettger	NEWESD 101
Shane Backlund	ESD 105
Tim Merlino	ESD 112
Flip Herndon	ESD 113
Aaron Leavell	OESD 114
John Welch	PSESD121
Steve McCullough	ESD 123
Michelle Price	NCESD 171
Ismael "Ish"	
Vivanco	NWESD 189

**AESD Staff**

Jessica Vavrus, Exec. Director  
Melissa Gombosky, Legislative Liaison  
Shayna Burmeister, Assistant

**Executive Board Members Present:** Terry Brandon, Dale McDaniel, Ann Byrnes, Darlene Stickel (virtual), June Sine, Marcia Henkle, Mehret Tekle-Awarun, Merle Kirkley (virtual)

• **Board Members Absent:** James Sebree

**Superintendents Present:** Aaron Leavell, John Welch, Tim Merlino (virtual), Rob Roettger, Shane Backlund, Steve McCullough, Flip Herndon

• **Absent:** Michelle Price, Ismael Vivanco

**Staff Present:** Jessica Vavrus, Melissa Gombosky, Shayna Burmeister

**I. Welcome & Consent Agenda**

Lead: President, Terry Brandon

For Reference: [6/10/25 meeting minutes \(draft\)](#) | [Today's Meeting Materials](#) | [AESD Key Contacts](#)

President Brandon welcomed the group and invited introductions around the table. He led the group in the Pledge and reviewed the agenda. President Brandon welcomed review and comment on June 10, 2025, meeting minutes. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes and Consent Agenda. Marcia Henkle moved to adopt the minutes and Consent Agenda. Dale McDaniel seconded the motion. The 6/10/25 minutes and the 9/23/25 Consent Agenda were adopted.

**II. Legislative Updates & AESD Priorities**

For Reference: [9/23/25 Legislative Update Slides](#)

President Brandon welcomed AESD Legislative Liaison Melissa Gombosky to provide an update on the 2026 legislative session and state budget. Melissa discussed the status of AESD and school district priorities, noting that the legislature's 14%+ cut to ESDs, compared to 6% for other state agencies, was an unintended consequence of widespread budget reductions. With so many new lawmakers, it was not apparent that these cuts were so disproportionate to ESDs. She emphasized the importance of advocating for student learning in addition to funding requests and concluded by answering questions from attendees. Melissa answered questions during the group discussion.

**III. ESD Hot Topics, Updates, & Top of Mind Discussion**

Resources: [ESD 25/26 state & "core" funding snapshot](#) (Aug. '25) | [ESD landscape of Federal funding](#) (May 2025)

This time is for Executive Board members and ESD superintendents to elevate important topics of interest and relevance for group learning and discussion. President Brandon welcomed additional topics and invited discussion on the following topics.

a. **ESD Funding Landscapes – State & Federal:** Superintendents engaged in a lengthy conversation that discussed the loss of approximately \$2 million in ECEAP funding amongst other funding, noting that ESDs provide one-third of ECAP slots statewide.

To offset the cuts, many ESDs have turned to their fund balances as a short-term solution to sustain core services. It was agreed that this approach is not sustainable long-term and presents challenges for future financial stability. Several superintendents described strategies being implemented to manage the reductions, including:

- Leaving vacant or vacated positions unfilled to avoid layoffs.
- Prioritizing essential programs and placing noncritical projects on hold.
- Exploring new grant opportunities to diversify funding streams.
- Reducing travel and conference participation to contain costs.

While these measures are helping ESDs navigate immediate challenges, members expressed concern about the loss of professional development and collaboration opportunities that come from participating in national conferences. These events have traditionally provided valuable insights into emerging trends, best practices, and innovation in education systems across the country. The group also reviewed and compared the current funding charts to those from 2024, noting that the distributions now look significantly different due to recent budget shifts and policy changes. In addition, the federal funding footprint for some ESDs is close to half of their overall operating budget. With uncertainty at the federal level the discussion centered on preservation and sustainability of impactful programs and services for districts. Participants emphasized the importance of communicating the impact of reductions clearly to lawmakers and staff so they have an understanding of the evolving fiscal landscape for ESDs. While ESDs currently maintain healthy reserves, members acknowledged that a long-term reliance on nearly half of the budget from federal sources presents significant risk, as such a model is not structurally sustainable.

#### **b. District Updates: Financial health updates**

For reference: [OSPI Funding Maps](#) | [Financial Health Website](#))

The discussion on ESD funding naturally transitioned into a broader conversation about the financial health of local school districts. This section provided time for Executive Board members and ESD superintendents to share timely issues and challenges for collective discussion and learning. President Brandon invited conversation. The group engaged in a thought-provoking discussion about the sustainability of current funding structures. federal dollars. Updates were provided regarding districts in binding conditions, as well as one district that is currently at risk of potential dissolution at the end of this year in the ESD 123 region. ESD 113 shared an update regarding a contested boundary dispute underway in their region. PSESD shared their experience with recent boundary disputes in their region.

Due to time constraints and the need for executive board approval on a few items, the agenda topics below will be covered at a future meeting.

#### **c. AESA & Federal Updates**

#### **d. AESD Updates**

- Redesign “Refresh”: [Aug. 2025 Refresh Report & Revised Bold Steps](#) and
- New Initiative: Summer Discovery Program (Balmer Group)

#### **e. Other ESD Updates or Top of Mind Issues**

#### **IV. Follow up from June Meeting: Briefing & Discussion: AESD Association Budget**

**Lead:** Terry Brandon, Jessica Vavrus

**For Reference:** [AESD 2526 Association Budget](#) – option including staff T&E for discussion

President Brandon and Executive Director Vavrus led a continued discussion on the AESD Association Budget. The budget presented provided a scenario that would include a line item for staff time and effort for supporting the AESD Association. This was a result of a request from AESD members at the annual conference, as well as executive board members interested in exploring what it would look like to include this in future AESD Association budgets.

The Board discussed how staffing contributions are currently absorbed by the AESD Network budget entirely. The group also discussed the overall revenue items that contribute to the Association budget. These include AESD Board Member dues totalling \$6,900/year and the flat contribution fee of \$5,500/ESD for Board and Superintendent attendance at the AESD Annual Conference. In addition, for the past two years, there has been a fund balance carry over from the Annual Conference which has further offset conference costs, and resulted in an increasing overall AESD Association fund balance.

While the overall fund balance has grown, and estimates are positive about maintaining or increasing further, the group also discussed the potential decline of sponsorships and ESD staff attendance to the Annual Conference. So while the Conference has generated an annual surplus of approximately \$20,000, there was some concern expressed about the sustainability of this assumption from year-to-year.

The group discussed a variety of ways to approach adding a budget item for staff contributions and support. One option discussed was based on actual time and effort. This could result in an estimated expenditure of \$40-43k/year. Another option discussed was to set a flat, not-to-exceed amount for budgeting staff operational support. A third option presented was to keep the budget as-is and silent regarding staff operational support. The Board discussed pros and cons of each approach. After discussion, members agreed to designate \$20,000 starting to acknowledge and help cover staff time and effort associated with supporting the executive board and planning/executing the Annual Conference. During the discussion, a question was posed about when this adjustment should take place. Since there is not a precedent or designated process by which the Executive Board amends the budget without membership approval, it was agreed that any change should take place when the next year's budget is adopted during the Annual Business meeting. Director Vavrus was asked to review the Constitution to verify whether there is any additional detail or process to consider.

In the meantime, June Sine moved to add a budget line item of \$20,000 for Staff Operational Support starting in 2026/27, including an annual review to assess adequacy in covering time and effort costs. Marcia Henkle seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

#### **V. 2026 Annual Conference Updates & Input**

**Lead:** Ann Byrnes, Aaron Leavell, Jessica Vavrus

Jessica Vavrus briefly shared the [2026 Web site link](#) and passed out Save the Date Magnets to each ESD Superintendent. Those who were not in attendance will receive them by mail. The Review & Discussion of [Draft Program Agenda & Session Input/Considerations](#) and [2025 AESD Board Support](#)

[Feedback Summary](#) will occur at the November 19, 2025 AESD Executive Board meeting. The 2026 Design Team will be providing further recommendations to the group after their meeting on 10/23/25. Prior to the Board's November meeting, a survey will be sent out to gather ESD board member feedback on the pre-conference day (Wednesday), potential keynote speakers, and breakout session content.

**VI. Good of the Order & Upcoming**

**Lead:** Terry Brandon / All

There were no additional items or pressing matters brought forward for discussion.

**VII. Adjourn**

The meeting was **adjourned** by President Brandon at 1:06pm.

**UPCOMING:**

**Wed. Nov. 19 Executive Board Meeting:** 2:30 – 4:30 @ PSESD

**AESD Membership Networking Dinner:** 5:30 – 7:30 @ Renton/Southcenter Area