



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, James Sebree, June Sine, Marcia Henkle, Mehret Tekle-Awarun, Merle Kirkley

Board Members Absent: Darlene Stickel, Marcia Henkle

Superintendents Present: Aaron Leavell, Flip Herndon, Ismael Vivanco, Michelle Price, Rob Roettger, Shane Backlund, Steve McCullough, Tim Merlino

Staff Present: Jessica Vavrus, Melissa Gombosky, Shayna Burmeister

I. Welcome & Consent Agenda

Lead: President, Terry Brandon

For Reference: [11/19/25 meeting minutes \(draft\)](#) | [Today's Meeting Materials](#) | [AESD Key Contacts](#) | [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 the November 19, 2025 meeting minutes. He asked for a motion to approve the minutes and the January 12, 2026 Consent Agenda. James Sebree moved to adopt the minutes and Consent Agenda. Dale McDaniel seconded the motion. The 11/19/25 minutes and the 1/12/26 Consent Agenda were adopted.

II. ESD Hot Topics, Updates, & Top of Mind Discussion

This time is for Executive Board members and ESD superintendents to elevate important topics of interest and relevance for group learning and discussion.

ESD Organizational (internal) Updates

Superintendent Herndon shared that the ESD 113 Board welcomed two newly elected members who joined the board: Vivian Eason (District 1, serving Morton, Mossyrock, Onalaska, Rainier, Tenino, Toledo, White Pass, and Yelm) and Tiffany Sevruck (District 7, serving portions of North Thurston and Tumwater). The Board also appointed Cheryl Vance as the new District 2 representative, replacing Don Rash following his mid-term resignation. Ms. Vance will begin serving in February 2026.

Superintendent Welch, shared the PSESD 121 Leadership Transition. Dr. Gustavo Balderas, the agency's next superintendent, will officially begin his leadership on July 1, 2026. The transition process will begin in February 2026. Superintendent Welch will retire at the end of June 2026 and will serve as superintendent-in-residence during the transition period.

ESD District Updates

The nine regional superintendents shared updates focused on current priorities and emerging issues across districts. Topics included regional trends, operational challenges, and ongoing efforts to address financial health concerns in several districts.

AESD Accreditation Panel Updates

([Flyer](#) | [School Summary](#)) ESD 101: May 11, 2026 and ESD 113: May 12-13, 2026

Superintendent Vivanco shared an update on the upcoming Accreditation Panel dates with one date being held at ESD 101 in Spokane and two dates being held at ESD 113 in Tumwater. Currently, there is a need for three board members and a facilitator for the panel being held in Spokane.

AESA Annual Conference Reflections?

Reflections were shared from the AESA Annual Conference held in Colorado Springs in early December. Highlights included a Strategic Design evaluation tool that was brought back for consideration, insights from peer associations across the country, and national perspectives on financial solvency challenges facing educational service agencies. Professional development remains a priority when resources allow, and participants noted the value of collaboration and shared learning with other states.

III. State Legislative Updates & AESD Legislative Priorities

Leads: Flip Herndon, Jessica Vavrus

For Reference: [Gov. Budget Proposal – AESD Topical Review](#) | [AESD Legislative Platform & Talking Points](#) | [Draft WASA Letter of Support for ESDs](#) | [Draft WASA Letter to Lawmakers re: No New Requirements](#)

Superintendent Herndon and Exec. Director Vavrus provided an update on the start of the Legislative Session. AESD Legislative Liaison, Melissa Gombosky was unable to join the meeting due to legislative commitments. They shared an overall update, including reminders on AESD priorities; a letter of support signed by the majority of district superintendents for ESD preservation; and synergy across the K-12 community regarding no new requirements this legislative session.

IV. Association Business

Leads: Terry Brandon, Jessica Vavrus

For Reference: [AESD Constitution](#)

Nominating Committee

President Brandon reminded the group that President-Elect Dale McDaniel will assume the role of AESD President at the 2026 AESD Annual Conference. He invited members to serve on the AESD Nomination Committee, which is responsible for nominating the President-Elect for the 2026–28 term. Board members June Sine, Marcia Henkle, and Merle Kirkley will serve on the committee and will meet prior to February 24, 2026, to bring forward a nomination. Board Member Kirkley will chair the committee.

Award of Distinction Committee & Nomination Timeline

Leads: Terry Brandon, Jessica Vavrus

For Reference: [Timeline & process](#) for 2026 Award

Discussion was held regarding the 2026 AESD Executive Board Award of Distinction, including the nomination and selection process and the artwork selection. Puget Sound ESD will coordinate selection of the student artwork for the award, and staff will convene with regional representatives to support the process, including framing as needed.

Clarification was provided that current AESD Executive Board members are not eligible for nomination; past board members remain eligible. The nomination window and timeline were

reviewed, with interest expressed in utilizing two board meetings to socialize the opportunity and submit nominations prior to the March deadline. The selection meeting will be held virtually. The selection subcommittee will include President Terry Brandon and Executive Board members Mehret Tekle-Awarun, Ann Byrnes, Jim Sebree, and Merle Kirkley.

WSSDA President & Exec. Director Outreach

The Board discussed strategies to strengthen relationships and coordination with WSSDA leadership and board members. Conversation centered on increasing mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of ESDs/AESD and local school boards and identifying meaningful opportunities for board-to-board engagement. Potential strategies discussed included participation in WSSDA conferences and regional meetings, development of a consistent slide deck or one-page overview to clarify the role and niche of ESDs and exploring opportunities for joint sessions or panel discussions featuring ESD, school board, and WSSDA representatives. The importance of sustained, intentional engagement on both sides was emphasized. Staff will reconnect with WSSDA leadership to explore scheduling opportunities and next steps.

V. 2026 Annual Conference Updates & Input

Leads: Aaron Leavell, Ann Byrnes, Jessica Vavrus

For reference: [2026 Web site link](#) | [Wednesday afternoon options](#) for discussion | [Draft program flow](#)

Program Design

An overview of the 2026 AESD Annual Conference was provided. Pre-conference activities on April 15 will include optional regional exploration opportunities hosted by OESD, including guided and self-guided experiences highlighting the Suquamish community and surrounding region. Conference programming on April 16–17 will feature a keynote presentation by Chan Hellman on The Science and Power of Hope, along with breakout sessions and networking opportunities. The Awards & Recognition Dinner will be held offsite at Kiana Lodge, with transportation provided. Registration information, lodging details, and regional raffle basket participation were reviewed. Board member registration is included as part of each ESD’s annual AESD contribution, with additional registration options available for staff, student board representatives, and guests.

Registration Process & Timelines

Conference registration information will be shared with attendees and executive assistants by January 25. Registration costs for Superintendents and up to nine (9) ESD Board Members per ESD is covered by each ESD’s annual AESD contribution. Separate registration links will be provided for additional board members, ESD staff, and guests attending the AESD Award & Recognition Dinner. The Annual Conference Design Team will continue to work on details for the conference. Group rate lodging cutoff is March 16, 2026.

Board members are encouraged to register and secure lodging prior to the cutoff date.

VI. Good for the Order

No items were brought forward. President Brandon adjourned the meeting at 2:58 p.m.