NWRDC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Meeting Minutes

November 19, 2025

1. Roll Call / Call to Order

The November 19, 2025 meeting of the Northwest Regional Data Center (NWRDC) Executive Committee was called to order by Dr. Damien Pattenaude at 10:30 AM at the NWRDC Mini Lab, 2121 W Casino Road, Everett, Washington.

2. Members Present

Dr. Damien Pattenaude, Chair – Superintendent, Renton School District
Kurt Gazow – Chief Technology Officer, Bellingham School District
Donna Morey – Chief Financial Officer, White River School District
James Peckham – Executive Director of Finance, Lakewood School District
Nirmala Grutzius – Director of Student Information Systems, Issaquah School District

3. Guests and Staff Present

Dr. Ismael Vivanco – Superintendent, NWESD
Lisa Matthews – Deputy Superintendent of Finance and Compliance, NWESD
Robert Pohl – Director, NWRDC
Kathy Bisig – Software Support Manager, Student Info Services, NWRDC
Mandy Bladek – Software Support Manager, Business Information Services, NWRDC
Caitlyn Smith – Print Shop Operations Coordinator, NWRDC
Elisse Clava – Administrative Assistant II, NWRDC

4. Approval of May 28, 2025 Minutes

The minutes of the May 28, 2025 NWRDC Executive Committee meeting were presented for approval. Dr. Damien Pattenaude moved, and James Peckham seconded, to approve the minutes as presented. Hearing no further discussion, the motion was carried unanimously among the Executive Committee members present.

5. Executive Committee Housekeeping

5.1 New Member Introduction – James Peckham

Robert Pohl welcomed James Peckham to the Executive Committee. Mr. Peckham introduced himself as the Executive Director of Finance for Lakewood School District. He previously served as the project lead for the district's Qmlativ migration and is now regarded

as the district's Qmlativ expert. Prior to joining Lakewood, he worked for Concrete School District, overseeing both the student and fiscal sides of Skyward SMS. He brings experience from both the legacy SMS system and the new Qmlativ platform, on both student and business operations. Robert Pohl and the Committee expressed their appreciation for Mr. Peckham's ongoing feedback and partnership in shaping training and process improvements.

5.2 Terms of Service and Open Seat

Robert Pohl reviewed the current Executive Committee terms of service. He noted that an open seat was created when Mike Sullivan accepted a position as Chief Financial Officer with Marysville School District and subsequently resigned from the Committee. Mr. Pohl thanked Mr. Sullivan for his prior service, and acknowledged that Mr. Kurt Gazow's term is scheduled to conclude at the end of the current school year. The Committee also recognized the ongoing service of Donna Morey and other members whose terms extend into 2027.

5.3 Appointment of Executive Committee Member – Nirmala Grutzius

Robert Pohl introduced Nirmala Grutzius, Director of Student Information Systems for Issaquah School District, and recommended her appointment to the open Executive Committee seat. Ms. Grutzius has been a long-time NWRDC client and partner, and currently leads a sizable student information services team in Issaquah. The district completed its recent migration to Qmlativ with Ms. Grutzius serving as a key project leader and thought partner, frequently sharing lessons learned, both successes and challenges with NWRDC staff and other districts.

A motion was made by Dr. Pattenaude seconded by Donna Morey, to appoint Nirmala Grutzius to the open Executive Committee seat for a one-year term. The motion carried unanimously. Ms. Grutzius thanked the Committee for the opportunity to serve.

5.4 Election of Chair and Vice Chair for FY 2025

The Committee conducted elections for Chair and Vice Chair for FY 2025. In response to discussion and expressions of willingness to serve, Mr. Kurt Gazow nominated Dr. Damien Pattenaude to continue as Chair of the Executive Committee. The nomination was seconded, and, following brief discussion, the Committee voted. All members present voted in favor, with Dr. Pattenaude abstaining. The motion carried, and Dr. Pattenaude was elected Chair for FY 2025.

Dr. Pattenaude then nominated Mr. James Peckham to serve as Vice Chair of the Executive Committee. Donna Morey seconded the nomination. The Committee voted and the motion carried unanimously. Mr. Peckham was elected Vice Chair for FY 2025.

6. NWRDC Updates

6.1 Director's Report – Robert Pohl

Robert Pohl provided an update on organizational highlights and recent work. He began by recognizing the significant efforts of NWRDC staff during the busy back-to-school period. Over the summer, the NWRDC team supported four consecutive Qmlativ migrations in July, followed immediately by the fall startup for seventeen districts recently live on Qmlativ. Ticket volumes exceeded expectations for both student and business teams. Robert noted that a few newly migrated Qmlativ districts had last-minute master schedule issues before school started, and the Student Information Services Team quickly stepped in, including over a weekend, to help rebuild schedules so middle schools were ready for students on the first day. He also acknowledged the Business Information Services Team for their work supporting the first September payrolls for Qmlativ districts. For ten districts, this was their first September payroll in Qmlativ; for seven more, it was their second.

Robert recognized the Print Services Team for adopting the mindset of "finding ways to say yes" or "yes with conditions" to incoming work. He noted that this was his first back-to-school season at NWRDC and that staff expertise and commitment were key to successfully navigating the workload.

Robert then reviewed recent staffing changes. Project Coordinator Jessica Berry resigned after being recruited by WSIPC to serve as a project manager, and long-time staff member Linda Hilley retired after approximately fourteen years with NWRDC. Both contributions were recognized, and the Committee was informed that the Project Coordinator position was posted, with interviews anticipated in early December. NWRDC has also posted three Senior Software Support Analyst positions, receiving thirteen internal applicants for these roles. Interviews for the senior analyst positions are scheduled, and selection decisions will be made in the coming weeks.

6.2 Student Information Services Team – Kathy Bisig

Kathy Bisig provided an update on the Student Information Services Team. Since April 1, the team has fielded over 6,000 support calls, reflecting the intensity of the migration and back-to-school period. The student team maintains a dedicated pre-migration group that meets weekly with districts to prepare for conversion, as well as a post-migration support group to provide a "soft landing" after go-live. This post-migration model offers an additional layer of rapid support for newly migrated districts that have become accustomed to frequent contact during the migration process.

Kathy described the expansion of Contract Business Services (CBS) into the student area. In one highlighted case, a district experienced the sudden loss of its registrar just before school started, alongside multiple new counselors and school leaders. NWRDC analysts stepped in to rebuild master schedules, support student placement, and ensure a functional opening of

school. This work, while labor-intensive, also accelerated staff development for newer analysts and helped the district avert significant disruption.

Robert and Kathy emphasized that contract services can provide critical support to districts facing staffing shortages while also generating revenue that helps offset cooperative fee increases.

6.3 Business Information Services Team – Mandy Bladek

Mandy Bladek reported that the Business Information Services Team also stepped in under CBS agreements to support two districts that were unprepared for the complexity of September payroll in Qmlativ. By temporarily providing hands-on processing support, NWRDC staff helped those districts complete payroll successfully while simultaneously building local capacity. Mandy noted that this type of fee-for-service work can offer districts a viable alternative when staffing reductions or turnover leave them without the expertise needed to complete critical business functions.

In addition, the business team has invested significant time in refining the Qmlativ migration process. Staff have consolidated multiple checklists into a more coherent and user-friendly set of tools, removed duplication, clarified language, and flagged tasks that must occur more than once in the migration timeline. These updated materials will be piloted with upcoming migration districts and are expected to improve both clarity and consistency.

Robert expressed appreciation to Mandy and to NWESD's business office, particularly Rose Oliver, for their collaboration on contract structures and financial processes that support CBS offerings.

6.4 Print Services Team – Caitlyn Smith

Caitlyn Smith provided an update on Print Services operations. She reported that the print shop is focusing on aligning expenditures closely with revenues, ordering stock as needed rather than filling shelves in advance. By shifting to a just-in-time inventory model and clearly communicating anticipated lead times to clients, the print shop has been able to reduce budget risk while continuing to meet demand.

In October alone, the print shop completed approximately 85 jobs, generating just under $37,000 in revenue, compared with roughly $17,000 in October of the prior year. Caitlyn also described a project undertaken with NWESD staff Joanie and Noreen to streamline billing, invoicing, and sales tax reporting. A unified spreadsheet now serves both Print Services and NWESD finance, reducing duplicate data entry and aligning sales tax calculations with new statewide requirements.

Robert commended Caitlyn for analyzing and modernizing print shop practices, including developing partnerships with vendors that can provide rapid turnaround on stock orders. Lisa Matthews thanked Caitlyn for her leadership in helping the ESD understand and implement the more robust sales tax processes now required. Caitlyn noted that Print Services is also supporting other ESDs, including ESD 114, by printing report cards, progress reports, and other forms.

6.5 Skyward SMS to Qmlativ Migration Update – Robert Pohl

Robert provided a detailed update on the Skyward SMS to Qmlativ migration schedule. NWRDC has now migrated approximately thirty districts, passing the mid-point of the overall migration effort. Twenty-seven districts remain, with tentative migration windows scheduled through fiscal year 2028. To protect staff capacity and maintain quality of support, NWRDC has adjusted its plan to target approximately seven migrations per year rather than the ten migrations attempted in summer 2025.

Upcoming migrations include one potential district over mid-winter break in February, followed by Lynden School District and Tukwila School District over spring break in April. In July, four migrations are planned: San Juan Island School District, Vashon Island School District, Walla Walla Public Schools, and White River School District. Robert noted that Lynden and Walla Walla have demonstrated strong readiness, with experienced business managers leading data cleanup and migration planning, while Tukwila and Vashon present greater readiness risks due to newer staff and limited SMS experience.

Robert summarized the new Migration Success Agreement (MSA) that is being used with current and future migration districts. Developed in partnership with Donna Morey and other district leaders, the MSA clarifies roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both NWRDC and member districts, including staffing, training, data validation, and communication. It also defines what "success" looks like at key milestones and at project completion.

A key component of the MSA is a shared understanding of product readiness. Districts are asked to conduct their own due diligence in evaluating Qmlativ against other student and ERP options (such as PowerSchool) and to acknowledge that they are accepting Qmlativ as it exists at the time they sign the agreement. Robert emphasized that NWRDC is willing to help districts make connections with peers using other products so they can make informed decisions before committing significant staff time to migration.

The MSA also addresses historical data migration. As a core service, NWRDC will migrate the current fiscal year plus two years of historical data. Districts may request up to five historical years; additional years are treated as fee-for-service work, with costs varying depending on whether validation and cleanup are performed primarily by the district, by NWRDC, or jointly.

Committee members discussed scenarios in which base product functionality may not yet exist in Qmlativ. Mr. Kurt Gazow referenced Bellingham's experience as an early adopter, where month-end close functionality was not available as expected. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that districts are not penalized through fee-for-service charges when product gaps, rather than district readiness, prevent completion of a migration. Robert agreed that the cooperative must be transparent and fair in such situations and reiterated the commitment to helping districts vet solutions before they commit to migration.

7. New & Pending Business – NWRDC/NWESD Goals, Financial Update, and Call to Action

7.1 NWRDC/NWESD Goals and Leadership Development

Robert reviewed the 2025–2026 NWRDC goals, which align with broader NWESD priorities. One shared ESD-wide focus is improving staff understanding of how concerns related to discrimination and bias are handled. Survey data indicated that many staff were unsure about existing processes. Dr. Ismael Vivanco and Ms. Lisa Matthews clarified that the goal is to increase transparency around reporting pathways and follow-up, rather than to respond to a specific incident. All departments, including NWRDC, are working to communicate and document expectations more clearly.

Robert also described ongoing leadership development work with consultant Yarrow Durbin. The NWRDC leadership team is using a "polarity" framework to understand tensions such as tradition versus innovation and equity versus uniformity. This work is intended to strengthen internal collaboration and will eventually extend to team-level conversations about change and continuous improvement.

The addition of Senior Software Support Analyst roles is a key element of NWRDC's people-building strategy. These roles will serve as mentors and coaches for newer analysts, lead refinement of the analyst proficiency program, and help prepare staff for upcoming retirements by developing the next generation of subject-matter experts.

7.2 Time and Effort Tracking – Zoho Implementation

In response to questions from Mr. Peckham and other Committee members, Robert described the planned transition from the legacy FootPrints ticket system to Zoho. While the initial implementation will mirror existing workflows, a later phase will introduce time-and-effort tracking within tickets. Analysts will be able to start and stop timers as they work on incidents, enabling NWRDC to gather better data on how long various tasks take and how workload is distributed across student and business teams.

This information will inform future staffing models, help identify where additional coaching or training is needed, and support more accurate planning for migration activities and new projects. It will also provide a stronger foundation for any future tiered service offerings.

7.3 Financial Update – Year End and Fund Balance

Robert Pohl presented a year-end financial update. NWRDC ended the prior fiscal year drawing approximately $300,000 from its program fund balance, significantly less than originally projected. The smaller-than-expected draw was achieved through careful cost controls, including holding several positions vacant (Administrative Assistant, Project Coordinator, Systems Operator, and two Software Support Analyst positions), significantly reducing on-call support expenditures, and shifting Print Services to a tighter inventory model.

On the revenue side, NWRDC experienced an unanticipated loss when Mukilteo School District left the cooperative and became its own data center, reducing revenues by approximately $221,000. Print Services revenues also declined earlier in the year before the recent uptick in jobs. Even with these impacts, prudent spending and vacancy management allowed NWRDC to remain within acceptable fund balance targets for the year.

7.4 Financial Forecast through FY 2030 and Fee Scenarios

Robert shared multi-year financial projections through FY 2030 based on different annual fee increase assumptions and staffing scenarios. Under a 4% year-over-year fee increase with no significant changes to staffing, projections show the program fund balance approaching zero within approximately two years. To prevent a negative fund balance under this scenario, NWRDC would need to reduce staffing by roughly six FTE over fiscal years 2026–2028.

An alternative scenario assumes a 6.3% annual fee increase, which would allow NWRDC to maintain current staffing levels without reductions, assuming benefits and other cost drivers remain within anticipated ranges. Robert noted that this level of increase may be difficult for districts facing enrollment declines and budget reductions.

To mitigate pressure on cooperative fees, NWRDC is pursuing an aggressive growth strategy for fee-for-service work, particularly in Qmlativ managed services and contract business services. The goal is to grow fee-for-service revenue by at least 50% year over year, reaching approximately $2.1 million by FY 2030. If achieved, this would allow NWRDC to hold cooperative fee increases closer to approximately 4.2% annually while maintaining staffing levels sufficient to support migrations and core services.

Committee discussion focused on the feasibility of these revenue targets, the need for clear "core" versus "core-plus" service definitions, and the risk of creating confusion or inequity among districts. Several members emphasized the importance of preserving NWRDC's

reputation for responsive, relationship-based support as a key differentiator from commercial vendors such as PowerSchool.

7.5 Future Managed Services and Tiered Support Concepts

Robert outlined early concepts for Qmlativ managed services and tiered support. Examples of potential managed services include security administration, annual report processing, master schedule build, and ongoing registrar or payroll support. Districts that no longer have sufficient internal capacity could contract for these services, while districts with robust internal teams could continue to manage them locally.

Over time, NWRDC anticipates developing a clearer menu of service tiers, ranging from a core support package to higher-tier options that allow more direct access to NWRDC staff by a broader set of district users. Robert stressed that any such model will be developed incrementally, with pilot districts and ongoing input from the Executive Committee, and that NWRDC will remain flexible in responding to true emergencies regardless of tier.

Committee members raised questions about how these changes would be communicated, how they would interact with cooperative fee increases, and how to avoid penalizing districts that previously received higher-touch support when that support becomes a fee-based service. Robert acknowledged these concerns and emphasized that better data, clear definitions of core services, and transparent communication will be critical as the model evolves.

8. Executive Committee Open Forum & Working Lunch

During the open forum, Executive Committee members shared updates from their districts and reflected on the broader fiscal environment. Dr. Pattenaude reported that Renton School District voters had recently approved both an Educational Programs and Operations Levy and a Technology Levy with approximately 66–67% "yes" votes, among the highest levy approval rates since the 1990s. He expressed appreciation for the community's strong support of public schools despite economic pressures.

Other members noted upcoming levy or bond elections and ongoing challenges related to declining enrollment and reduced revenues. The Committee discussed the importance of clearly communicating the value of cooperative services and the trade-offs districts face as they evaluate costs amid constrained budgets.

9. Upcoming Meetings

- February 4, 2026 – 12:30–2:00 PM via Zoom
- April 15, 2026 – 12:30–2:00 PM via Zoom
- May 20, 2026 – 12:30–2:00 PM via Zoom

10. Adjournment

There being no further business, Dr. Damien Pattenaude adjourned the meeting at 12:48 PM.

OFFICIAL APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Signed by:

Damien Pattenaude
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Date: 2/6/2026

NWRDC Executive Committee Chair

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Dr. Ismael Vivanco
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Date: 2/6/2026

NWESD Superintendent, NWRDC Executive Committee Secretary