Minutes

Executive Committee Meeting
August 27, 2025 | 7:30 – 9:00 am

AGENDA

7:30-7:35
- Approval of meeting agenda.
- Approval of May 14, 2025 minutes

7:35-7:50
- President's report

7:50-8:05
- Finance report – FY25 reports and FY25 audit
- Membership report
  - Renewal status
- Development report
- Program report
  - STEM Education Conference
  - School Leadership Conference

8:05-8:30
- Board Survey review

8:30-8:45
- MINNDEPENDENT 50th anniversary event
  - Format, committee, day/date

8:45-9:00
- Executive Session
  - FY26 president's goals and priorities

MINUTES

Those present: Tim Benz, Dean Broadhead, Kate Wollan, Michael Lamb, Brian Lynch, Joel Landskroener, Teri McCloughan

Staff present: Michele Skare

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 AM.

Michael called for a motion to accept the minutes as written. Motion made by Brian, seconded by Teri. Motion passed.

President's report

Tim reported on summer activities including membership renewals, tracking school leadership changes, and Title funds. The administration essentially *impounded* most of the Title funds (ESEA programs).

For context, Title I provides services for students who need additional academic support, and many of our schools participate in this program. Title II provides professional development dollars, which schools use for staff development, conference participation, and sometimes for membership in our organization. Title III is used less often, as it supports English Language Learners and Migrant Education programs. Title IV is a broad category that supports 21st-century learning and technology initiatives.

The administration's action primarily impounded Title II funds, along with some Title III and IV funds. This created a significant hiccup in planning and disrupted many school initiatives. Fortunately, the funds were released in late July/early August.

He also noted Greg Sogaard's retirement from MDE and plans to meet with the new staff member overseeing non-public pupil aids.

Tim recently attended the Lutheran Educators Conference at Mayer Lutheran. It was a great opportunity to connect with many of our schools, educators, and leaders, and Joel's support is appreciated, making sure we have a presence there. This ties into his goals for the year, which include building on the success we had at the Capitol by making the most of conferences and gatherings where school leaders are present. These events give us the chance to share our advocacy wins, connect with current members, and identify prospective members.

Looking ahead, we'll also be present at the MNSAA Conference, the United Christian Schools Conference, and other administrator gatherings throughout the fall.

Tim provided an update on the Educational Choice for Children's Act (in "the one big beautiful bill") a new federal tax credit scholarship program that requires states to opt in. He noted his skepticism about Minnesota's participation given the current political climate

but shared that a meeting is scheduled Thursday with several state entities to discuss strategy.

He explained that North Carolina will likely be the first state to opt in, having overridden a governor's veto through a Republican supermajority. Minnesota, by contrast, has only a one-vote majority in the legislature, making adoption less likely. If Minnesota does not opt in, residents could still claim the federal credit by directing contributions to scholarship organizations in other states, such as Iowa or South Dakota, though this would support students there rather than in Minnesota.

The program is scheduled to begin January 1, 2027, leaving time for possible political shifts. Tim emphasized the importance of having scholarship-granting organizations in place beforehand. Using the Aim Higher Foundation as an example, he explained that organizations must be established, operating, and structured to manage federally designated funds separately from existing dollars.

Joel asked if it was too early to encourage families to email the Governor. Tim responded that it is not too early, though guidance from the U.S. Treasury is still forthcoming.. He also noted that opponents are mischaracterizing the program as draining funds from public schools, though it has no connection to state education budgets and should be viewed simply as a federal tax credit.

Finally, Tim addressed a question regarding whether the program includes a sunset clause. He stated that, to his knowledge, there is no sunset provision, but he will follow up with Ricky at Aim Higher to confirm.

Finance report

The finance report showed a strong balance sheet with six months of reserves. Yearly performance is favorable compared to budget, though net income is slightly lower due to fewer grants.

We do not budget for the 3M grant because of its uncertainty, and therefore we also do not budget the related expenses. Since we did receive the grant, the expenses were incurred, which explains the increase associated with the Science from Scientists programming. In addition, some board-approved expenses for the advocacy platform contributed to the higher totals, though that initiative was highly successful.

The annual audit is proceeding smoothly with no issues identified.

MINNDEPENDENT

Membership report

Membership renewals are on track at 60 percent, with four to five new schools joining, including three returning members: Mary Queen of Peace in Rogers, St. Mary's in Owatonna, and Redeemer Christian in Wayzata. Invoices will be resent during the first week in September. We are hopeful of our usually good renewal status of 95%. Tim noted that he may reach out to board members for assistance with a few renewing schools. He mentioned Norwood Young America as an example, which has faced challenges this summer and may need extra support. Joel Landskroener responded that he would be glad to speak with them.

In discussion, a question was raised about market share, noting that Minndependent represents approximately 40 percent of schools but 50 percent of students. It was observed that most of the schools not currently engaged are smaller in size, with the average nonpublic school in Minnesota enrolling about 165 students. Member schools tend to be larger than this average, which accounts for the higher student percentage relative to the number of schools. Smaller schools may perceive membership as unaffordable, which helps explain the gap in overall market share.

Development report

Sponsorship remains strong, with growth in several areas, though large grants continue to be a challenge. The STEM Conference at Heritage Christian Academy drew roughly 135 attendees, including many first-time participants and entire staff groups.

The Development report noted the recent rejection from the Ciresi Walburn Foundation, marking the seventh unsuccessful attempt despite alignment with its priorities in education, private schools, and advocacy. While the organization has not been able to establish a successful connection with this funder, overall grant relationships remain strong.

Grant season is beginning again, with meetings planned in the fall with the Hardenbergh Foundation and continued engagement with the Schulze Foundation. Long-standing partners such as 3M, Xcel, and the Schott Foundation remain solid, though 3M is experiencing some internal changes. A few new donors have been added this year, which is positive as the organization looks to build on the fundraising momentum from its 49th year heading into the 50th. The board was thanked for achieving 100 percent participation in giving for the second consecutive year, an important factor in donor relations, with special appreciation extended to Michael for his leadership in this effort.

Program report

The board discussed broadening the scope of the STEM Conference to include innovation and AI. Attendance has declined in recent years, from 340 participants to around 135, due in part to perceptions of the event being too specialized. Timing was also discussed, with survey results favoring August but conflicts with other events making June more feasible.

Tim and Kate proposed forming a school focus group to gather feedback on programming, including STEM and AI initiatives.

Registrations for the School Leadership Conference currently stand at 40, with some concern about conflicts with other conferences.

Board Survey review

Michael shared his reflections on the recent board survey. He noted that he and Tim envision doing a similar exercise with the full board at the next meeting. His takeaways were threefold. First, the results clearly show that the board holds Minndependent, Tim, and the overall operations of the organization in very high regard. Second, the survey affirmed that the purpose of Minndependent is profoundly impactful, and that a sense of love and meaning shines through in how people view the organization. Third, the results indicated a desire among board members to be more involved, though many are unsure how best to do so.

He emphasized that the first two findings reflect strength, while the third presents an opportunity. He sees a need to find ways for board members to engage more actively, particularly around promoting the organization, attracting new members, and supporting board development. He cited one comment in particular that stood out: “I want to actually do something,” suggesting that members want to contribute beyond attending meetings.

Tim shared his reflections on the board survey, noting that it is encouraging to have two years of results and suggesting that last year’s and this year’s findings be presented together at the upcoming board meeting for comparison. He observed that the results are moving in the right direction and reflect the ongoing evolution of the board. He emphasized that the board continues to strengthen, with engaged members who want to be involved and new members adding to its capacity.

He agreed with Michael’s assessment that board members are eager to contribute but sometimes need specific invitations to do so. He cited Dean’s appointment to chair the nominating committee as an example of how simply asking members to take on responsibilities can increase engagement. He likened this to development work, where opportunities are missed unless the ask is made.

He underscored that engagement is not solely about fundraising, but also about drawing on the talents and ideas of members to strengthen the organization. As an example, he pointed to Kate’s observation about the STEM conference as a demonstration of collaborative problem-solving. Tim concluded that the board is in a strong position, continues to improve each year, and should remain focused on building momentum.

Dean agreed with Michael's conclusions and recalled previous board conversations about how members can do more to support educators. He noted that for non-educators on the board, the question is often how best to contribute to those on the front lines who bring direct experience from schools.

As an example, Dean shared that his company is doing significant work in artificial intelligence, including training professors at the University of Minnesota's Hubbard School on how to use AI. He suggested that expertise like this could be valuable to Minndependent schools as well, and emphasized the importance of board members contributing their skills and passions where they can. He pointed to survey questions 9 and 10 as highlighting the opportunity to better leverage board members' expertise.

Teri reflected that the board survey demonstrates how the organization is evolving. She noted that in the past, the board's role was often limited to providing funding for STEM grants, but over the past year their engagement has expanded significantly. She observed that the survey results show a willingness—particularly among members who are not in the education field—to find ways to support the broader mission. Teri echoed Dean's point that non-educator board members are eager to contribute in meaningful ways beyond financial support.

Joel agreed with Michael's assessment, noting that the survey confirms Minndependent has a strong board that deeply values the organization and its work. He observed that, as with any nonprofit board, there is always a danger of getting "into the weeds." With such a small staff, he believes Minndependent has one of the most dynamic boards related to staff size, but emphasized the importance of maintaining the board's role in governance and policy rather than management.

As an idea for strengthening board engagement, Joel suggested providing more teaching about the history of the organization. He shared that his own school has been doing this to help newer members gain context and perspective and felt it could benefit board members as well. While he acknowledged that it may not directly lead to greater involvement, he believes it would deepen understanding of Minndependent's work.

Brian echoed Joel's comments, emphasizing the importance of balance. He observed that while it is encouraging that board members want to be more involved, it is essential to find "easier plug-in" opportunities that align with Minndependent's work without creating unnecessary burdens. He noted that this balance often falls to Tim, who must weigh whether board involvement adds value or instead creates more work for the small staff.

Drawing on his own experience at a larger school, Brian explained that the board's role is clearly defined as policy, not management. When boards begin to step into day-to-day operations, the result can be more work rather than meaningful support. He stressed that the goal should be to leverage the skills and talents of board members in ways that strengthen the organization while remaining manageable for staff.

Tim and Michael plan to present the survey results at the next board meeting.

Minndependent's 50th Anniversary Event:
The board discussed planning for Minndependent's upcoming 50th anniversary celebration. Tim noted that the June meeting had introduced the idea and suggested pausing the normal Education Awards for one year to focus on celebrating the organization's history and accomplishments. He emphasized that the event should highlight Minndependent itself, rather than individual honorees, and suggested forming a small planning group with board involvement to guide the process.

Discussion centered on the event format and timing. Tim proposed moving the event from its usual Sunday to a weekday evening to make it more accessible for board members to bring guests and potential supporters. Teri supported the idea of a weekday program and suggested re-engaging the President's Cabinet and incorporating a video history featuring past champions, award recipients, or students who benefited from STEM grants. Kate raised concerns that a midweek event would limit participation to the Twin Cities metro area, making it difficult for members traveling from across the state. She recommended considering Sunday or Monday to allow for travel. Tim agreed that accessibility for statewide members is a key concern, noting that Sunday events have historically been chosen for this reason.

The group discussed venue options, with Mendakota still reserved as a likely location with a capacity of 200–225. They also weighed the timing, recognizing that April and May are crowded with other galas and school events but acknowledged there may be no perfect date. Joel suggested leaning into the established spring timing to maintain consistency and brand recognition.

The board also discussed ways to make the event distinctive, without turning it into a formal gala. Joel suggested exploring a "celebrity piece," such as a notable MISF/ Minndependent alum, and Kate and Teri mentioned astronaut Heidi Stefanyshyn-Piper as a potential example. The idea of forming a working group to refine details was endorsed, with Tim noting that new board member Josh Schultz had already volunteered to participate.

Finally, Joel recommended creating a special 50th anniversary logo or "mark" to brand the celebration. He noted that the Minndependent community includes graphic design talent that could help.

Executive Session

The committee met in Executive Session at 8:36 am

August 27, 2025
/s/ Dean Broadhead
Secretary