

## ESSA IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING

April 20, 2026

12:00 – 3:30 p.m. CDT

Brynhild Haugland Room and Microsoft TEAMS

**Facilitator:** Amanda Peterson

**Note Taker:** Lisa Johnson

**Members Present:** Amy Arness, Levi Bachmeier, Jessica Brandt, Ned Clooten, Aimee Copas, Amy DeKok, Mary Eldredge-Sandbo, Ann Ellefson, Scott Faul, Lucy Fredericks, Michelle Fuller, Robert Grosz, Cheryl Hagar, Brad Hawk, Lisa Johnson, Andrew Jordan, Melanie Kathrein, Kerri Kraft, Marcus Lewton, Matthew Lonn, Alyssa Martin, Laurie Matzke, Mary McCarvel-O'Connor, Jamie Mertz, Lori Nappe, Maria Neset, Amanda Peterson, Rebecca Pitkin, Randy Rice, Angie Richter, Russ Riehl, Luke Schaefer, Stan Schauer, Sashay Schettler, Ellie Shockley, Wayne Sick, Cory Steiner, Lisa Symens, Rachel Tabler, Tabitha Teel, Jim Upgren, Jess Willard, Arlene Wolf

**Guests:** Levi Long, Chance Schaffner, Shannon Sorenson

**Members Absent:** Catherine Anderson, Nick Archuleta, Tracey Bauer, Heidi Budeau, Amber Cieslik, Tracy Friesen, Julie Jaeger, Tracy Korsmo, Mike McHugh, Susan McPherson, Sara Medalen,

## MINUTES

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**Welcome:** Superintendent Levi Bachmeier welcomed the group. He talked about how our state can stay on the leading edge and accurately describe what is going on in our schools. He commented that federal and state accountability requirements are not going away. The focus will be on student outcomes. The relevant question is whether our agency is measuring what matters most to ensure we are setting kids up to be successful once they graduate. He thanked the committee for the work they do to make things better for students.

Amanda Peterson gave an overview of the topics for the meeting. Amanda informed the group that Laurie Matzke's last day is April 21. She thanked Laurie for her dedication and hard work and outlined what Laurie will be doing at her new position with National Center for Grow Your Own.

### **Federal Updates – Amanda Peterson**

Amanda talked about interagency agreements (IAAs). The IAAs are moving portfolios and projects to different departments. Title I will be moving to the Department of Labor (DOL). There are discussions about whether special education will be administered in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The concern of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) is how this will happen. Some of the turmoil surrounding funding which occurred last summer resolved itself.

Amanda talked about President Trump's "skinny budget." This budget is not necessarily the budget Congress will adopt. The president would like the funding to be under one umbrella, such as a block grant. If this were to happen, the unfortunate side effect would be a reduction in the overall funding total. She said that last year showed that Congress is not interested in defunding the programs in the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESEA). Amanda said that the biggest change NDDPI will see with the move to oversight by a different agency would be the adoption of a different grants management system. She has confirmed that the July 1 disbursement will come out through the current grants management

system. Discretionary grants are coming out through the DOL. Many of our contacts are the same. Superintendent Bachmeier made some comments about Kirsten Baesler's interest in making sure the rollout is good for the states.

Amanda showed a chart of the 2026-2027 preliminary federal funding. She said it was level funded. Last year there was a \$4 million reduction in Title I, this year that amount was reinstated. She then talked about discretionary grant opportunities. There are some for states, LEAs, and higher education. She encouraged school leaders to check the [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) website for these opportunities. The grants are directly tied to Secretary McMahon's priorities. Amanda talked about considering the ability to implement the grant successfully and the return on investment before applying for a discretionary grant. She highlighted a new grant opportunity for charter schools program grants to state entities for states without charter schools.

Amanda informed the group that whenever the NDDPI posts information for public comment, the ESSA committee will be informed. NDDPI considers the ESSA Committee to be a representative body. Amanda talked about the work of the federal flexibilities work group. This group is discussing three different topics:

1. The alternative poverty method.
2. A waiver that would classify our entire state as rural. This would provide flexibility.
3. Flexibility with administrative funds. This would create more ability to do projects that would be less siloed.

The waiver would probably precede the amendment. These items would be brought before the committee.

### **Student Engagement Data Presentation – Dr. Ellie Shockley**

Dr. Ellie Shockley talked about the recent student engagement survey. In the past, this was a Cognia measure. There were frustrations with the administration and the technology. When NDDPI decided to create a student engagement survey in-house, we looked at measures that could be used in an in-house survey. A Likert scale was used. The older students had a five-point scale, and the younger students had a four-point scale.

Ellie explained that we needed a way of bucketing students based on their scores. The cutoffs were decided by factors that most closely mirrored the Cognia survey. Ellie shared the preliminary results. Districts saw the average scores and their district scores.

Ellie is working with North Dakota Information Technology (NDIT) staff to continue building this process. The goal is for schools to be able to see their results immediately. Ellie made the comment that the cell phone law appeared to increase engagement scores.

The question was raised about what can be done with school-level data. Amanda said that the goal is to release results sooner on the K-12 Reporting and Analytics platform.

### **Assessment Results – Stan Schauer**

Stan Schauer talked about the results for the new state summative assessment, ND A+. The standard setting set rigor and expectations via the scale scores. The cut scores are on the ND A+ website. He said the participation rate for our state is consistently over 95%.

The ND A+ is a grade banded assessment. Compared to previous years there was a shrinking to the middle in ELA. Math scores had the opposite effect. A committee member asked Stan to explain the dip in the percent proficient in ELA. Stan said it grew in proficient by 5% and dipped in advanced by 10%. He explained that a new baseline is set each time there is a standard setting process and schools shouldn't look back to previous year's data. He said that the biggest changes occur when the tools change. The goal would be to get ten years of solid longitudinal data in a row.

Stan explained the difference between the NAEP and the ND A+. NAEP has good longitudinal data but a small sample size (6-7% of students in the state), and the ND A+ has bad longitudinal data but a great sample size (96% of students in the state).

It was suggested by a committee member to post something on the Insights dashboard to remind viewers not to reflect on past data in relation to current data. NDDPI team members said there is verbiage like that on the site. Dr. Shockley said she could work with Jeff Bradford to make it more apparent.

Stan went over student scores by grade level. Stan said they look at the items to make sure they match what is in our standards. Our state has good scores in math, but it doesn't show up in state assessments, it shows up in national assessments (NAEP).

Scores are per grade level, per subject, and per standard. It is not a test that determines whether a student can read, it determines proficiency. The data set shown is the state story, not the district or local story. The statewide story is not an indication of how your school is doing. Assessment is one piece of evidence, not the entire story.

Superintendent Bachmeier asked Stan to take the NAEP scores and compare it to our state-defined levels of proficiency. If we, as a state, have vastly different numbers than other states, we have a process issue. Superintendent Bachmeier doesn't see that we are wholly out of line with our peers. He challenged NDDPI and the committee members to think about how we continue to ensure the process used to set cut scores is a representative sample of our educators to ensure the numbers are set by people who do this every day in the field and that the data is legitimate and objective. The goal is to have public perception match the actual results.

Stan stressed the importance of looking at other test scores when looking at data. For example, on the ACT test, North Dakota has the highest math average in the country, but our state math scores make it appear that we aren't doing that well.

### **ESSA Plan Amendment Progress – Amanda Peterson**

Amanda went over the progress on the ESSA plan amendment. Because our state is looking at growth differently, it was decided to propose an amendment to our state ESSA plan. This amendment would not be submitted until March 2027. This committee will look at proposed amendments at the fall meeting.

Some of the proposed changes might also include removing writing from the state assessment because it is not nationally mandated. The NDDPI might also potentially look at how teacher effectiveness could be measured more effectively.

Stan talked about a new student growth model. This work has been furthered since it was voted on by the committee. Growth is going to look at how many microlevels we moved. Indicators of good growth need to be defined. A tool has been created to help with those.

Phase two involves an Excel document that will help calculate performance level.

Superintendent Bachmeier said the questions that need to be asked are:

1. How do we measure growth differently?
2. How do we weight these scores?
3. How do we balance these two things?

Once we decide on a data table, data points can be entered to obtain results. This will also help to validate accountability data. Stan anticipates we will be able to use it this year.

### **Choice Ready Update – Laurie Matzke**

Laurie Matzke gave updates and information about Choice Ready. She said there was not unanimous support to include AVID in the Choice Ready framework due to it not being available to all students. Regarding the military pathway recommendation, the Center for Distance Education (CDE) has been adding courses. The Choice Ready Subcommittee voted unanimously to move forward with a proposal presented by Levi Long.

Levi Long and Lt. Colonel Schaffner presented information about a proposed change to the Choice Ready framework. One was to remove the section requiring completion of two or more additional indicators from the post-secondary and workforce options and the detailed information regarding completing two credits in the military pathway program, including course names. If approved, the framework would have the following verbiage:

- Complete Two credits of Military Science Coursework
- OR
- Complete two credits of JROTC or Civil Air Patrol

Levi Long discussed the rationale behind the proposed changes including providing flexibility for program implementation. There was discussion by the group about how these changes would affect the goal of inclusion of military ready on the Choice Ready platform. Jim Upgren suggested any proposed changes not go into effect until 2029 to account for the four-year plan. Lt. Colonel Shaffner made the comment that the military pathway serves the purpose of showing how the military pathway melds together with the other pathways.

These proposed changes would need to be voted on by the whole committee. It was discussed that a voting link might be sent out with the minutes, but there was enough discussion in the room that NDDPI might delay this vote while it gathers more information.

Laurie reminded committee members about the Choice Ready report deadline, which is June 30.

### **ND FIRST – Rachel Tabler**

Rachel Tabler gave an overview of the accountability process and how schools are identified as TSI, CSI, or ND FIRST. CSI is a federal designation. ND FIRST schools are schools that have been identified as CSI for a second round.

NDDPI wanted identified schools to determine their baselines so they can determine how they are progressing. Elevate Collective is working with NDDPI to help schools during the process.

Amanda talked about honoring schools' accountability goals and giving them opportunities to individualize what those goals look like in a weighted progress measure. If schools are showing improvement with their data, that is honored.

### **Title I Alternative Poverty Method – Angie Richter**

Angie Richter gave an update on the Title I alternative poverty method. This method was in effect from the nineties until 2025-2026. Currently, we have adopted the census method but a task force recently decided to propose an alternative poverty method again. Only districts with a city population of less than 20,000 would qualify for the alternative poverty method. The formula being proposed would use 50% census data and 50% free and reduced numbers. The advantage of using the alternative method would be the ability to track the funds based on the mobility of the students.

NDDPI will be requesting stakeholder feedback about the proposed waiver. Once NDDPI applies for the waiver, the United State Department of Education (USDE) will have 120 days to approve or deny the waiver. If a Title I alternative poverty method is approved by the USDE, it will go into effect for the 2027-2028 school year.

Amanda talked about the issue, saying it has been contentious. She also talked about some of the implications of the potential adoption of universal free school meals in North Dakota. Districts would still need to have families fill out free and reduced forms to receive federal reimbursement.

**Closing:** Amanda Peterson made closing comments, stating that the fall meeting will be in person, the winter meeting will be via Teams, and the venue for the spring meeting will be determined later.

Committee members will be receiving two emails relating to today's meeting. One from Stan Schauer with an Excel document, and another email within the next week which will include the meeting PowerPoints and meeting minutes.

**Meeting adjourned.**