



# IDEA Advisory Meeting

## MINUTES

APRIL 23, 2026

9:00 AM – 12:00 P.M.

VIRTUAL MEETING

<b>MEETING CALLED BY</b>	Christopher Larson
<b>TYPE OF MEETING</b>	IDEA Advisory Meeting
<b>FACILITATOR</b>	Christopher Larson
<b>NOTE TAKER</b>	Michelle Souther
<b>ATTENDEES</b>	Michelle Souther, Mary McCarvel-O'Connor, Nicole Reybok, Christopher Larson, Lucy Fredericks, Grace Larsen, Brooke Tayer, Michelle Pfaff, Jennifer Withers, Katy Barnum, Andrea Johnson, Michelle Griffin, Jeff Anderson, Alyssa Kramer, Michael Netzloff, Aimee Easton, Allison Miller, Stephanie Bouche, Mistie Clementich, Holden Bouilly, Tammie O'Toole, Cassandra Bartelson, Tina Degree, Fayme Stringer Henry, Jacqueline Adusumilli, Danielle Westerhausen, Donene Feist

### Agenda topics

#### BY-LAWS

CHRISTOPHER LARSON

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<p><b>Committee Bylaw Changes Discussion:</b> Nicole Reybok and Christopher Larson led a discussion with the committee and raised the question of whether the bylaws should be changed so that the <i>acting chair</i> serves a longer term. Their concern is that the current structure doesn't provide enough time for a chair to learn the role, understand committee dynamics, explore initiatives in the first year, and then effectively implement them in the second year before transitioning out—leading to discontinuity. The proposal discussed was to extend the acting chair's appointed term to support smoother leadership and sustained progress. It was noted that bylaw amendments must be submitted in writing 30 days prior to a vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing bylaw language was reviewed, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Members may serve multiple terms but must reapply after each three- or six-year period.</li> <li>○ Appointees serve three-year terms beginning July 1st, with staggered terms.</li> <li>○ Members may serve up to two consecutive terms unless their agency has no alternate representative.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The suggested change would remove the requirement for a mandatory three-year break between terms.</li> </ul> <p>The vote requires a two-thirds majority for it to pass.</p> <p>A survey will be sent out to gather committee votes on whether to proceed with the proposed bylaw changes. If the committee wishes to move forward, the formal vote will occur at the next scheduled meeting.</p>
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#### IDEA-B APPLICATION

MARY MCCARVEL-O'CONNOR

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<p><a href="#">ND Part B-FFY2026 Application</a> - Annual State Application – IDEA Part B (FFY 2026) Public comment on the Annual State Application Under Part B of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was held on April 15, 2026, and no public comments were received.</p> <p>Mary reported that the IDEA B grant application has been submitted and is posted online, with the final application deadline expected around May 21st, pending allocation information from the Department of Education. She mentioned a slight nationwide increase in funding, but it is unclear how this will affect North Dakota until allocations are received, and the committee will be updated once more information is available.</p>
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INDICATOR 8- Parent Survey Changes

ALLISON MILLER

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<p>Allison Miller presented proposed revisions to the parent survey questions for Indicator 8, seeking feedback from committee members to improve clarity and parent-friendliness. Every year we have our districts send out or at our state level we will send out a survey to parents with a child that is on an IEP. The Parent survey is questions that are asked of parents to see how included they feel that they are in the IEP process. Allison described the process of revising parent survey questions to make them more understandable and relevant, focusing on parental inclusion in the IEP process and updating language for clarity. The goal of the revision is to make the language more parent-friendly and easier to understand, particularly for those who may be new to special education. One example discussed was current Question #10, "My child's school informs me of my parental rights," and how some families may know these as the "blue book" rather than "procedural safeguards," prompting the need for clearer wording. Allison is requesting feedback via a survey.</p>
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GENERAL SUPERVISION

ALYSSA KRAMER

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<p>Following the state's Differentiated Monitoring and Support (DMS) visit in January (approximately 18 months prior), the agency received a formal directive requiring all LEAs to be monitored once every six years. This shift establishes a cyclical monitoring system, aligning with federal expectations for general supervision under IDEA. LEAs are grouped into cohorts, organized by Special Education Units (SEUs) to reduce burden on unit directors. The LEAs in the first cohort (shown in purple on the monitoring chart) will begin the new cycle. The grouping is intended to streamline coordination.</p> <p>Andrea raised concerns about staff anxiety regarding focus monitoring, and Alyssa agreed to provide a FAQ or guidance document to clarify the compliance-based nature of the process and alleviate fears. The state acknowledged this and assured that monitoring is not meant to be punitive, but rather a review of documentation requirements, supported by established compliance matrices and checklists.</p> <p>Andrea also noted that alignment with state expectations will help units better calibrate their internal compliance monitoring processes conducted each June/July.</p>
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SPP/APR

ALYSSA KRAMER

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<p>We submitted the SPP/APR on February 1st. We had a clarification period. We got our information back and we only received 4 responses from OSEP. During the review of the state's Annual Determinations materials, it was identified that the introductory section omitted the word "timely" when describing the factors used (valid, reliable, and timely data). We clarified to the OSEP lead that the state does, in fact, include timeliness in its determinations, and the omission was simply a wording oversight. The OSEP lead indicated that adding "timely" back into the introduction was sufficient. OSEP may follow up with the state regarding the public announcement process, but the explanation provided during the call was acceptable. The final statement in the introduction referenced that OSEP could not access the general supervision link. This occurred because the state website was temporarily down. While you were on the call, the OSEP lead confirmed that all links were functioning properly, including those associated with Indicator 17 and narrative descriptions such as the theory of action.</p> <p>Additionally, indicators 3B and 3D required new or revised baselines and updated targets due to the new NDA+, and OSEP formally acknowledged and accepted these revisions and the updated target.</p>
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PARENT TO PARENT PROGRAM – NEEDS IN ND

DONENE FEIST

<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<p>Donene Feist from Family Voices provided some things they are seeing with families that are on IEPs or 504. Family Voices is a statewide health information and Education Center that operates primarily on grant funds and donations. Family Voices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps families navigate complex systems (education, medical, behavioral health).</li> <li>• Supports families in both routine and crisis situations.</li> <li>• Provides trainings, navigation support, crisis prioritization, and a Parent Leadership Institute.</li> <li>• Partners with national groups</li> <li>• Collaborates through a multi-agency Education Committee to track statewide issues impacting families.</li> </ul> <p>Staff work across multiple regions statewide, but gaps in coverage remain, especially in Minot and Devils Lake. Cross-region staffing is used as needed to support families.</p>
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Things that staff are seeing, one thing that we see really prevalent across the state is some predetermination.

- Predetermination: Families report being told their child will *not* qualify before any evaluation or IEP meeting occurs.
- Some districts reportedly have "waiting lists" for IEPs.
- Requests for evaluation sometimes dismissed as "a waste of time."
- Medical diagnoses are sometimes ignored during evaluations.

There has been some failures to provide behavioral support sending a child home for a behavior instead of assessing the issue.

- Students sent home for behavior rather than receiving FBAs or BIPs.
- Parents blamed for behavior instead of behavior being assessed.
- Lack of manifestation determination meetings when required.
- Use of shortened school days without a clear path back to full attendance.
- Some schools sending students home to "clear the room" rather than implementing plans.
- Families report denial of needed services, accommodations, or assistive technology due to time or staffing constraints.
- Some schools reportedly conflate a 504 Plan with an IEP, telling parents one replaces the other.
- Lack of paraeducator support results in students being sent home frequently.
- Students eligible for services until age 22 being told the school can do "nothing more," without reviewing or updating transition goals.
- Academics being used as justification for exiting students prematurely.

And then also remembering that the parent is still part of the IEP team.

- Parents being talked *at* or *over*, rather than treated as part of the IEP team.
- Families with full guardianship not always being appropriately included.
- Prior Written Notice (PWN) misunderstood or misused—sometimes not provided or provided incorrectly.

There also seems to be a lack of accommodations in an IEP is what staff is reporting.

- Families report denial of needed services, accommodations, or assistive technology due to time or staffing constraints.
- Some schools reportedly conflate a 504 Plan with an IEP, telling parents one replaces the other.
- Lack of paraeducator support resulting in students being sent home frequently.

We have such a high level of turnover. And behaviors are becoming increasingly more at younger ages in our rural districts, which a lot of our staff are maybe not as familiar or comfortable with. How do we minimize the barriers in accessing good PD and training on the different things that we can do classroom based? MTSS intervention prior to moving to more formal steps. Such as that behavior, referral or special Ed referral for evaluation because. Even though we try to provide PD, sometimes our districts can't afford to send teachers because of the cost of the training, if it's outside of their contractual obligation times, they must pay for the training then plus stipend to the teachers. Plus, providing transportation to the trainings in person is always better.

The IDEA Advisory Committee were doing listening tours across the state trying to get parents to come in and share what's going on and get information out to families in a more easily consumable way where we're not talking all the legalese. As an advisory, we really want to turn this into being solution focused and seeing how our advisory committee can help to address the needs in North Dakota. While the parental rights handbooks are important, they're written in a legal manner, and that's for a very good reason but parents may find it difficult to understand, so the committee wants to make this information more accessible.

Grace shared a resource:

<https://www.ndpanda.org/sites/www/files/documents/COMMON%20GROUND%20Manual%20final.pdf>

Donene said she has a listserv that goes out every week on Monday, if there's an event that you guys have, we could gladly put that in there. We have a biannual newsletter, hard copy newsletter that goes out twice a year, once in February and then once right before school starts.

Family Voices North Dakota fvnd.org

**Interim Education Committee Work - HB 1530-Study special education teacher shortages, circumstances and collective needs**

- HB 1530 – Study special education teacher shortages, circumstances and collective needs.
- HB 1547-Study special education funding
- SCR 4019-Study reading and mathematics proficiency rates among students in the state with disabilities and the effectiveness of current educational policies, programs, and resource allocations in addressing any disparities

**Meeting Dates**

- September 3, 2025
- November 5, 2025
- March 4, 2026
- May 6, 2026

The May 6 meeting focused on special education funding in North Dakota and whether the current funding formula could be improved. A key takeaway was the emerging belief that the issue may not be a lack of funding, but rather the need to reduce paperwork and increase paraprofessional support. Grand Forks plans to present how a single high-needs student can significantly affect a district's budget, and the Wahpeton special education director has also shared their district's financial impact. However, concerns were raised about tight budgets leading to no salary increases for special education teachers this year. With ongoing recruitment and retention challenges, stagnant wages may worsen staffing shortages.

**Children's Cabinet Subcommittee Work (HB 1556) –**

The subcommittee is making progress toward defining youth with complex needs, increasing regional collaboration, and improving system alignment.

The December–February regional meetings were extremely successful and generated enthusiasm for ongoing regional collaboration.

Major barriers include transportation, funding, staffing, and professional development access, especially in rural districts.

**DISCUSSION**

There is strong interest in creating regional Level-D options, improving cross-system communication, and developing sustainable structures supported by the state.

Legislative engagement will be critical to address systemic funding and staffing challenges.

**Infinite Campus Work** – Will be moving from Tienet to Infinite Campus July 1, 2026. [BRIDGE | North Dakota Department of Public Instruction](#)

**Temporary Custody Paper** - The committee has been hearing many questions about whether individuals responsible for children in temporary state custody can legally provide consent for special education decisions. Under IDEA, a parent cannot be someone acting in the role of a state agency, which creates a conflict when temporary custody is held by HHS. To address this confusion, legal clarification was sought and shared with HHS, and statewide guidance will be developed next year. This issue is not unique to North Dakota—it is a challenge seen across the country.

The forthcoming guidance will clarify that unless a parent's educational rights have been formally removed, the parent must still be invited to participate in educational decisions. If a parent is unwilling or unable to participate, the school is required to appoint an educational surrogate. This will likely increase the responsibility on districts to find surrogates in a number of cases. NDDPI also plans to release guidance related to recent legislative changes that allow some parents with terminated rights the possibility of regaining those rights. Although no known cases of reinstated rights have occurred yet, future case law will be important in understanding how this plays out, especially when parents were not previously involved.

**Public Comment SPP/APR** – The State Performance Plan (SPP), a six-year plan that includes 18 IDEA indicators, is up for renewal for 2026–2031. Several changes to the indicators, Indicator 1, they're looking to clarify, what states must report if states allow students with IEPs to graduate with a regular diploma without meeting all the requirements as students without IEPs – North Dakota does not allow this, but some states do. They are looking at eliminating Indicator 4a and 4B. Indicators 4A, which relate to significant discrepancies in discipline, may be removed from federal reporting, though states would still identify districts with issues. We just wouldn't have to report it to the Department of Education. Indicator 7, they're just looking to change some wording changes especially Outcome A instead of saying social-emotional, they would replace with more academic language. For Indicator 8, states must show that they

survey all districts within a defined cycle; North Dakota already surveys all districts annually. The requirement to analyze respondent demographics would be removed.

For Indicator 9 (disproportionate representation), some reporting requirements would be eliminated. Because Indicator 18 already requires states to address both student-level and systemic corrections for noncompliance, the proposal is to stop reporting this information within the earlier indicators and consolidate it under Indicator 18. Indicator 10 is being considered for removal because it is not IDEA-specific. Indicators 11, 12, and 13 would also shift so that states only report noncompliance through Indicator 18, reducing duplicative reporting. Indicator 14 would no longer require demographic analysis of survey responses, and Indicator 17 (ESSA plan) would reduce historical reporting requirements to lessen paperwork for states. Public comments on these proposed changes are open until May 28.

SUPERINTENDENT BACHMEIER INTRODUCTION

CHRISTOPHER LARSON

**DISCUSSION**

The Superintendent expressed deep appreciation for everyone engaged in conversations about improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

He emphasized that schools exist for all kids, and this work helps fulfill that mission—turning aspiration into real practice.

He shared the three questions guiding his statewide school visits:

1. What makes you most proud?
2. What challenges are you facing?
3. What do I need to know—as someone new to Bismarck—to better support your work with all North Dakota students?

Workforce was named the top starting point for improvement.

Key issues:

- Pay must be part of the conversation
- Hard-to-fill special education roles
- Ongoing statewide staffing shortages (also reflected in shortage reports in NDDPI documents)
- The need for creativity, incentives, and growing the workforce pipeline

He wants to identify what’s working well in North Dakota—the “models of excellence”—and understand which practices can be replicated statewide.

Superintendent Bachmeier emphasized the need to:

- Improve alignment between districts and families
- Focus not just on legal compliance but on positive culture and best practices
- Understand what good engagement looks like outside IEP meetings
- Support community-specific strategies and statewide learning from what works

In response to questions about university engagement, the Superintendent agreed collaboration is important but emphasized the need to go further upstream, including:

- Making it easier and less costly for districts to offer education-career pathway courses
- Strengthening Department of CTE financial incentives
- Increasing interest in education careers earlier in students’ schooling

When asked what support the committee could provide, the Superintendent shared that:

- North Dakota already has the answers somewhere—the strength is in people collaborating
- The committee can play an important role in the next legislative session
- Advocacy is needed to ensure education remains a state priority
- Legislators must understand that North Dakota must address existing issues before taking on new ones
- A strong coalition (including members of this committee) will be required

SUGGESTIONS SUMMARY		
<b>Issues and Concerns in our State:</b> No issues.		
ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DEADLINE

The December meeting minutes were approved. Aimee Easton made the motion, and Andrea Johnson seconded it.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:23 pm. Andrea Johnson made the motion to adjourn, and Aimee Easton seconded it.

**Public Comment:** No Public Comment.

The September meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2026.

Agenda Items for the September meeting:

- IDEA/ICC New Member Training
- Behavioral Health Conference – Andrea Johnson and Nicole Reybok
- Specially Designed Services Office Updates
- Discussion on how do parents and educators work together. Social Media? – Chris Larson and Nicole Reybok