

**STATE BOARD OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
February 23, 2026**

State Board of Public School Education members met at the conference room at the Hughes Educational Building, Bismarck and via Microsoft Teams on Monday, February 23, 2026

**State Board Members in Attendance:**

Chair Sonia Meehl  
Vice Chair Mike McHugh  
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom  
Board Member Morgan Forness

**State Board Members in Attendance Virtually:**

Board Member Jason Rohr  
Board Member Eric Nelson  
Superintendent Levi Bachmeier

**Others in Attendance:**

Mark Openshaw (Assistant Attorney General)

**Others in Attendance Virtually:**, Shauna Marchus (NDDPI Admin), Melissa Hamilton (Attorney General Paralegal), Adam Tescher (NDDPI), Luke Schaefer (CEO of Central Regional Education Association - CREA)

Chair Meehl called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. CST

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: January 26, 2026**

Lyndsi Engstrom moved to approve the minutes from the January 26, 2026, meeting. Mike McHugh seconded the motion. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

**2. REA Audit Presentation: Central Regional Education Association (CREA)**

Lyndsi Engstrom declared a conflict of interest noting that she is employed by the Central Regional Education Association and the presenter Luke Schaefer is her direct supervisor. She stated that her intent is to have the Board determine whether or not to allow her to participate in the REA presentation and action.

Mark Openshaw reviewed the two options available to the board members when they have a conflict of interest explaining that a board member can recuse themselves from the action on any topic that they have a conflict of interest, or a board member can state the conflict and the other board members can make a motion and vote to allow the member to be allowed to participate in the action.

Mike McHugh moved to allow Lyndsi Engstrom to participate in the REA presentation and the action, despite her conflict. Morgan Forness seconded the motion.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>VOTE (Yes/ No)</b>
Board Member Jason Rohr	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes

Superintendent Levi Bachmeier	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Board Member Morgan Forness	Yes
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Abstained

The motion passed 6-0.

Luke Schaefer presented an overview of CREA and answered Board member questions. He noted that CREA serves 57 school districts throughout its three regions. He highlighted NDREA statewide collaborative efforts, as well as reviewed CREA's governance structure and organizational chart. Luke Schaefer explained CREA's core services, which fall into three main categories: professional learning, integrated student support services, and school support services. He discussed statewide programming that CREA provides, including AVEL eCare for virtual school health, BHERO for behavioral health technical assistance, the ND Full-Service Community Schools Consortium, and ND A+ for assessment platform support. He shared CREA's impact data, noting various offerings categorized by N.D.C.C. requirements.

Luke Schaefer reviewed CREA's financials including revenue streams and sources portrayed through various charts. It was noted that CREA relies heavily on grants, which account for approximately 60% of revenue, followed by contracts at 10%, school fees at 15%, and state funding at about 10%. In FY 2023–24, CREA reported \$12.8 million in revenue and \$12.3 million in expenses, resulting in a carryover of roughly \$500,000. Chair Meehl asked if there is a state-imposed restriction on an REA's ending fund balance. Luke Schaefer confirmed there is no state cap, but CREA's board sets an internal goal of maintaining a 20% fund balance, and the organization is currently at about 14%. Chair Meehl noted that recent audits of other REAs showed much higher percentages and questioned why CREA had a lower carryout. Luke Schaefer explained that larger fund balances help ensure continuity of services if grants end mid-year, especially for smaller schools that rely heavily on CREA. He added that while the board strives for the 20% target, they often overspend to meet school needs, prioritizing service over building reserves. He offered a complete audit report for 2024 and mentioned that the 2025 audit report is not yet complete.

To conclude his presentation, Luke Schaefer highlighted CREA's successes such as expanding before and after school programs, as well as challenges like staffing shortages without competing with schools for certified educators.

Chair Meehl asked about accreditation challenges and whether CREA shares concerns that the current Cognia process does not meet REA needs. Luke Schaefer responded with shared concerns, stating the Cognia model allows accreditation but lacks meaningful continuous improvement. He explained that CREA has worked with the ND Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a new process that includes external reviews, self-evaluations, and formal reporting to the board and state. He noted that CREA will pilot this system in spring, operating on a four-year cycle with reports submitted within 90 days of completion. Future board meetings will include either internal self-assessments or external review reports.

Mike McHugh moved to approve CREA’s biennial audit presentation. Morgan Forness seconded the motion. No further discussion.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>VOTE (Yes/ No)</b>
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes
Board Member Jason Rohr	Yes
Board Member Morgan Forness	Yes
Superintendent Levi Bachmeier	Yes
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

The motion passed 7-0.

**3. Final approval of the Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order for the the Reorganization of the Fort Ransom Public School District No.6 and Lisbon Public School District No.19.**

Chair Meehl asked attorney Mark Openshaw to explain why the Board needs to approve this document after they have already approved the minutes of the meeting at which the reorganization was considered. Mark Openshaw explained the purpose of approving the final Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order document, which he noted is the official findings, is for the Board to have the opportunity to review the document, ensure the Boards findings were represented accurately, and to verify there are no errors in the information.

Mark Openshaw noted that the reorganized school district is keeping the number 19 indicated in section Q of the final findings, which was not known at the time of the hearing.

Lyndsi Engstrom moved to approve the Final Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order for the Fort Ransom / Lisbon Reorganization Plan. Jason Rohr seconded the motion. No discussion was held.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>VOTE (Yes/ No)</b>
Board Member Jason Rohr	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes
Superintendent Levi Bachmeier	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Board Member Morgan Forness	Yes
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

The motion passed 7-0.

Chair Meehl noted that since the reorganization was approved by this State Board, it will now go onto a vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:12 p.m.

Minutes taken and prepared by Shauna Marchus