

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

State Board of Public School Education members met at the State Capitol Building in Bismarck, in the Pioneer Room and via Microsoft Teams on Monday, February 23, 2026

State Board Members in Attendance:

Chair Sonia Meehl
Vice Chair Mike McHugh
Board Member Morgan Forness

State Board Members in Attendance Virtually:

Board Member Jason Rohr
Board Member Eric Nelson

State Board Members Absent:

Superintendent Levi Bachmeier
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom

Others in Attendance:

Mark Openshaw (Assistant Attorney General), Judge Hope Hogan (Administrative Law Judge), Jodi Johnson (Ward County Supt. of Schools), Troy Walters (Supt. of Parshall Public Schools), Robert Andes (Petitioner), Jennifer Andes (Petitioner),

Others in Attendance Virtually:, Shauna Marchus (NDDPI Admin), Melissa Hamilton (Attorney General Paralegal), Marc Ritteman (Supt. of Lewis and Clark Public Schools), Erin Lacina (NESC Director of Professional Learning and Operations), Jennifer Carlson (NESC Executive Director)

Chair Meehl called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. CDT. Shauna Marchus conducted the roll call. Chair Meehl noted that a quorum was reached with five board members in attendance.

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes: February 23, 2026

Vice Chair Mike McHugh moved to approve the minutes from the February 23, 2026, meeting. Jason Rohr seconded the motion. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

2. REA Audit Presentation: Northeast Education Services Cooperative (NESC)

Executive Director Jennifer Carlson, and the Director of Professional Learning and Operations Erin Lacina presented an overview of NESC's mission, structure, services, impact and challenges, as well as answered Board member questions. They noted that the NESC serves 23 diverse school districts across the region. They explained that their work focuses on strengthening school systems, supporting educators, and improving student outcomes through professional development, school improvement support, technology services, and data-driven instructional practices. They highlighted major initiatives such as Science of Reading training, support for Infinite Campus implementation, a rotating Technology Learning Cooperative, instructional coaching, targeted and comprehensive school improvement support, 21st Century afterschool programs, and dual-credit pathways. They noted that all member schools participated in NESC professional learning last year, and over 4,000 students engaged in student programs or events. They also reviewed NESC's financial oversight efforts, ongoing audits, and the braided funding model that combines federal, state, and local dollars. They discussed the new statewide REA

continuous improvement process, with NESC scheduled for external review in the fall of 2026. Challenges mentioned included balancing school priorities with internal organizational needs amid limited time and capacity, especially with only five total staff. Successes included stronger systems alignment, collaborative staff practices, and creative funding strategies.

During the Q&A, Board members asked about staff capacity, technology partnerships, collaboration with TrainND, and general fund carryover. Jennifer Carlson and Erin Lacina explained that NESC partners with CTE through its Technology Learning Cooperative, which rotates high-tech equipment, such as drones and 3D printers, so schools can use emerging technology without purchasing it individually. They also contract with TrainND to provide services like ALICE active-shooter training at a reduced rate. The Board also noted that NESC's general fund balance was roughly 50 percent of annual expenditures in 2023 and nearly 60 percent in 2024 and asked whether a policy guides that carryover. Jennifer Carlson explained that there is no formal policy. Instead, the NESC maintains a larger reserve because REA funding is unpredictable and often tied to short-term grants. The higher carryover ensures staffing and operations can be sustained during lean funding years. With only five employees, maintaining reserves provides stability and protects essential services.

3. Hold a hearing, discuss, and take action on the Annexation of property from the Parshall Public School District No.3 of Mountrail County to the Lewis and Clark Public School District No.161 of Mountrail County in North Dakota (Andes Petition)

The Andes annexation hearing was held beginning at 1:30 pm CDT and was conducted by Administrative Law Judge Hope Hogan from the Office of Administrative Hearings, pursuant to North Dakota Century Code (N.D.C.C) Chapters 15.1-12 and 28-32. This was an evidentiary hearing for the Board to hear testimony and consider other evidence as presented on issues as outlined in the Andes Annexation packet which was entered into evidence and marked as Exhibit 1. Judge Hogan explained the procedures of the hearing as well as the penalties for perjury. She noted that the Board wished to waive the rules of evidence per N.D.C.C § 28-32-24. She explained that at the close of testimonies, the State Board of Public School Education will make the final decision. If any party does not agree with the final decision, they may appeal under N.D.C.C ch. 28-32, the Administrative Agencies Practices Act. The proceedings were recorded, and all persons testifying were sworn in by Judge Hogan.

The Board heard testimony from:

- Jodi Johnson (Ward County Superintendent of Schools)
- Robert Andes (Petitioner) in support of the annexation
- Jennifer Andes (Petitioner) in support of the annexation
- Troy Walters (Superintendent of Parshall) in opposition of the annexation
- Marc Ritteman (Superintendent of Lewis and Clark) in support of the annexation

Troy Walters provided a map to board members. Judge Hogan marked it as Exhibit 2.

The evidentiary hearing ended at 2:27 pm CDT. Judge Hogan left the meeting.

Chair Meehl and Mark Openshaw read through the petition packet. Mark Openshaw noted some adjustments in the calculations for the per student valuation.

Board members listed relevant factors that they wanted considered and added to the Findings of Fact.

Discussion was held and included brief conversation regarding open enrollment protocols. Mark Openshaw noted that irregular school boundary lines should not be considered a finding in annexation decisions. Members agreed to revise the county's findings on bussing to better reflect the testimony presented, and they also agreed to remove the finding stating that this was the second annexation in seven months. Additionally, Openshaw informed the Board that a recent change in law now requires approval from landowners in order to complete an exchange of property.

Mike Mchugh moved to approve the Andes petition for the following reasons:

- Open enrollment is uncertain for future children in the Andes family
- Petitioners are aware their taxes will increase
- Students that reside on the property have been attending Lewis and Clark
- Petitioners expressed desire to vote in the district where their child attends

Morgan Forness seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed 3-2. The Andes petition is approved and will take effect July 1, 2026.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:04 p.m. CDT

Minutes taken and prepared by Shauna Marchus