



K-12 Education Coordination Full Council Meeting Minutes

June 10, 2026
North Dakota State Capitol
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck, ND 58505
& via Microsoft Teams
Rooms 210/212
1:00 p.m.

K-12 Council Members Present In Person:

Chairman Luke Schaefer, Brandt Dick, Jeremy Mehlhoff, Melissa Vollmer, Sarah Ricks, Sara Medalen, Beth Slette, Maria Neset, Nick Archuleta, Representative David Richter, Senator Donald Schaible, Representative Pat Heinert, Amy De Kok, Tomi Cimarosti

K-12 Council Members Present Virtually: Sonia Meehl, Superintendent Levi Bachmeier, Justin Fryer

K-12 Council Members Absent: Senator Ryan Braunberger, Angel Lindseth

Others Present In Person: Mark Vollmer, Amanda Peterson, Ellie Shockley

Others Present Virtually: Kassie Schaff, Bujaya Shrestha, Yuchang Yuan, Robert Stupnisky, Tahsin Rahman, Dawn Ulmer, Stan Schauer

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Luke Schaefer at 1:00 p.m.

Administrative Updates

- Members were informed that staff transitions had occurred and that meeting files, agendas, minutes, and related materials would continue to be maintained through the Council's Teams site.
- Members were reminded how to access meeting materials and presentations electronically.

Introduction of New Council Member

Tomi Cimarosti introduced herself to the Council and shared:

- More than 25 years of experience working with youth, families, tribal nations, and educational systems.
- Current role with Bismarck Public Schools as Indigenous Education Director overseeing Title VI and Johnson O'Malley programming.

- Interest in contributing to council initiatives and supporting educational improvement efforts statewide.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Luke Schaefer called for approval of the November 13, 2025, minutes.

Motion: Brant Dick moved to approve the November 13, 2025, minutes. Melissa Vollmer seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Review and Housekeeping

The chair reviewed the agenda and confirmed that enough members would remain throughout the meeting to maintain a quorum.

Additional updates included:

- The Aspirational Goals committee will not meet today nor will the Legislative Subcommittee; however, members will receive an initial presentation from the BEARS research team later this afternoon.
- Significant emphasis was placed on the upcoming August 11, 2026, meeting, which will focus heavily on reviewing and discussing the final BEARS report and identifying potential legislative actions. Members were encouraged to attend in person or virtually due to the importance of the upcoming discussions.

The chair reminded members that the Council serves as a forum for open discussion, collaborative problem-solving, and coordinated statewide educational efforts. Members were encouraged to ask questions and engage candidly in discussions.

An additional agenda item was added concerning North Dakota A+ Assessment results and recent communications regarding reporting decisions presented by Stan Schauer and Amanda Peterson from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction.

School Innovation and Site Visit Findings

A report was presented summarizing observations from school visits conducted by a council subcommittee.

Key Themes Identified

Members reported several common practices among high-performing schools:

Student Ownership of Learning

Schools demonstrated efforts to increase student ownership and engagement in their learning processes. Several pilot efforts were highlighted as positive examples.

Balanced Use of Technology

Discussion emphasized the importance of balancing educational technology with meaningful teacher interaction.

Members observed:

- Programs such as IXL and other digital tools can be beneficial.
- Student success is most strongly supported when interventions are guided by educators rather than relying solely on computer-based instruction.
- Technology should supplement and not replace effective teaching practices.

Relationship Building

Successful schools intentionally created opportunities for:

- Parent involvement.
- Older students mentoring younger students.
- Strong student-adult relationships.

Members agreed that these relationship-centered approaches contributed significantly to positive school cultures.

Sharing Success Stories

Members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to visit schools and learn directly from educators.

Discussion highlighted:

- Schools often fail to adequately share successful practices.
- Future school visits should continue.
- Schools demonstrated a willingness to share effective strategies and innovations.

The committee also reported developing white papers and accompanying glossaries to ensure educational terminology is understandable to educators, legislators, parents, and community stakeholders.

Legislative Funding and Budget Process Discussion

Council members received a detailed overview of North Dakota's education funding process.

State Budget Structure

The presentation explained that state funding consists of:

- General funds (primarily tax revenue)
- Special funds (fees, tuition, licensing revenue)
- Federal funds

While K-12 education represents the largest state-funded investment, other agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, have larger overall budgets due largely to federal funding.

Per-Pupil Funding

Discussion emphasized:

- Even a 1% increase in per-pupil funding represents approximately \$25 million.
- Funding decisions therefore require significant analysis and forecasting.

Budget Development Process

Members reviewed:

- Agency budget requests.
- Governor budget recommendations.
- Legislative revenue forecasts.
- Legislative authority to propose additional funding initiatives.

Discussion highlighted the complexity of balancing requests that frequently exceed available revenue projections by billions of dollars.

Revenue Forecasting

Legislative leaders explained:

- Multiple independent revenue forecasts are reviewed.
- Forecasts account for oil prices, agricultural commodities, economic conditions, and state revenue trends.
- Lawmakers generally adopt conservative projections to ensure fiscal stability.

Historical Funding Trends

Members discussed:

- Long-term trends showing consistent increases in per-pupil funding since the 1970s.
- Ongoing questions regarding whether increases have fully kept pace with inflation and rising educational costs.
- The increasing dollar impact of percentage-based funding increases as the per-pupil amount grows.

Cognia Accreditation Update

A substantial portion of the meeting focused on accreditation and school improvement processes.

Accreditation Framework

Presenters reviewed:

- Accreditation scoring systems.
- Six-year accreditation cycles.
- Mid-cycle reviews.
- Evidence-based evaluation processes.

Discussion emphasized that accreditation serves as a school improvement tool rather than simply a compliance measure.

Transparency of Scores

Members discussed:

- Whether accreditation scores should be publicly displayed.
- Challenges associated with publishing scores that remain static over six years.
- Concerns regarding changes in rubrics and scoring methodologies over time.
- The distinction between accreditation status and detailed scoring information.

Evaluation Process

Presenters described:

- School self-assessments.
- Submission of evidence and documentation.
- Interviews with administrators, teachers, and students.
- Review of curriculum implementation and leadership practices.
- Collaborative scoring processes among accreditation teams.

Standard 31 – Student Growth

Significant discussion centered on Standard 31, which focuses on:

- Valid and reliable assessment systems.
- Evidence of student growth.
- Use of data for continuous improvement.

Members noted that this standard carries particular significance because it directly examines whether schools are producing measurable student outcomes.

School Improvement Focus

Presenters emphasized:

- Schools receive extensive feedback rather than simple ratings.
- Reports identify strengths, opportunities, and recommended actions.

- Accreditation reviews help schools document processes and sustain improvement efforts despite leadership changes.

Follow-Up Request

Members raised questions regarding score weighting and transparency. NDDPI staff agreed to seek additional information from Cognia regarding scoring methodologies and communication practices.

Elliott Observations and Student Engagement

Members reviewed updates to the Next Generation Elliott observation framework.

Key Changes

Discussion highlighted:

- Elimination of digital learning as a stand-alone category.
- Integration of technology indicators into broader engagement measures.
- Increased emphasis on student learning experiences.

Focus on Student Engagement

Presenters emphasized that Elliott observations:

- Are not teacher evaluations.
- Focus entirely on student engagement and learning experiences.
- Examine differentiation, instructional practices, technology integration, and progress monitoring.

Statewide Comparisons

Members questioned why North Dakota scores often appear below national averages despite strong accreditation performance.

Discussion concluded that:

- North Dakota's broad participation creates a more representative dataset.
- Many other states rely on voluntary participation by higher-performing schools.
- The data remain useful for identifying improvement opportunities.

Student Voice

Members discussed the importance of:

- Understanding student experiences.
- Gathering student feedback.
- Ensuring policy decisions remain grounded in learner experiences.

Several members expressed concern that student perspectives are often overlooked in educational improvement efforts.

Diagnostic Review Program

Presenters reviewed NDDPI's partnership with Cognia to provide diagnostic reviews.

Program Overview

The department funded:

- Twenty diagnostic reviews during the previous year.
- Twenty additional reviews for the upcoming year.

Purpose

Diagnostic reviews:

- Are more intensive than accreditation reviews.
- Focus on individual schools rather than entire systems.
- Provide deep analysis of school effectiveness and improvement opportunities.

Feedback from Schools

Presenters reported:

- Strong participation from both high-performing and struggling schools.
- Positive feedback from educators.
- Appreciation for opportunities to share concerns and receive meaningful feedback.
- Some educators described the reviews as the first time they felt their voices had been heard.

North Dakota Assessment Reporting Update

Members received an update regarding recent decisions affecting state assessment reporting.

Discussion focused on:

- Maintaining validity and integrity of assessment results.
- Decisions related to reporting timelines and standard-setting processes.
- Communication with educators and districts regarding assessment adjustments.
- Positive feedback and cooperation received from school leaders and educators statewide.

Members expressed appreciation for transparency and the commitment to ensuring accurate reporting.

BEARS Research Presentation

The council received an interim presentation from the University of North Dakota BEARS research team.

Discussion included:

- Progress toward the final report.
- Data collection efforts.
- School selection methodology.
- Preliminary findings.
- Anticipated delivery of the final report by June 30, 2026.

Members were advised that the report will become a major focus of future council and legislative discussions.

Attendance Study and Coding Recommendations

The Council reviewed work conducted regarding attendance tracking and absenteeism.

Survey Findings

The committee surveyed educators and administrators regarding attendance coding practices.

Findings indicated:

- Significant variation among districts.
- Lack of consistency in coding approaches.
- Desire for meaningful data while avoiding excessive administrative burden.

Recommendations

The committee proposed:

- Two attendance categories.
- Five absence categories.
- Integration into Infinite Campus systems.

The goal is to improve data quality while maintaining practical implementation expectations.

Discussion Topics

Members discussed:

- Parent privacy concerns.
- Differences between elementary and secondary attendance structures.
- Partial-day absences.
- The distinction between attendance reporting and chronic absenteeism accountability measures.

- Balancing research needs with local flexibility.

Action Items

1. NDDPI will seek additional information from Cognia regarding accreditation score weighting and transparency.
2. Members will prepare for extensive review of the BEARS report prior to the August 11, 2026, Council meeting.
3. Attendance workgroup will continue refining attendance and absence coding recommendations.
4. Council members will continue sharing school innovation examples and identifying future school visit opportunities.
5. Members were encouraged to communicate questions and feedback regarding ongoing studies and reports before the next meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting concluded following completion of agenda items and subcommittee reports. Future meetings will focus heavily on analysis of the BEARS report and potential legislative recommendations.

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

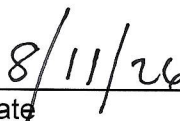
Next Full Council Meeting: August 11, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

ATTEST:



Chairman Luke Schaefer



Date

Minutes taken and prepared by Jill Schwab