

ESSA IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE MEETING

January 29, 2026
8:00 – 11:00 a.m. CDT
MS TEAMS

Facilitator: Amanda Peterson

Note Taker: Deb Pilon

Members Present: Catherine Anderson, Nick Archuleta, Amy Arness, Tracy Bauer, Heidi Budeau, Ned Clooten, Aimee Copas, Mary Eldredge-Sandbo, Tracy Friesen, Michelle Fuller, Robert Grosz, Cheryl Hagar, Brad Hawk, Julie Jaeger, Andrew Jordan, Melanie Kathrein, Tracy Korsmo, Kerri Kraft, Marcus Lewton, Levi Long, Matthew Lonn, Alyssa Martin, Mike McHugh, Sara Medalen, Lori Nappe, Maria Neson, Randy Rice, Russ Riehl, Luke Schaefer, Wayde Sick, Cory Steiner, Lisa Symens, Levi Bachmeier, Ann Ellefson, Lucy Fredericks, Mary McCarvel-O'Connor, Jamie Mertz, Amanda Peterson, Angie Richter, Stan Schauer, Sashay Schettler, Rachel Tabler, Tabitha Teel, Jim Upgren, Arlene Wolf

Members Absent: Jessica Brandt, Greg Carlson, Amber Cieslik, Amy DeKok, Scott Faul, Lisa Johnson, Laurie Matzke, Susan McPherson, Rebecca Pitkin, Jess Willard

MINUTES

Welcome: Amanda Peterson welcomed the group and gave an overview of the meeting.

Federal Updates – Amanda Peterson

- **Education Freedom Tax Credit:** The US Department of Education and Treasury released on January 27, 2026 a Joint Fact Sheet on the Education Freedom Tax Credit. It is the largest national expansion of education choice, created under the Working Families Tax Cuts Act. This tax credit will provide families with affordable options for K-12 education services like tutoring, scholarships, and support for students with disabilities. Taxpayers can claim up to \$1,700 credit for contributions to Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs), which fund scholarships for school choice and related expenses. So far, 23 states have opted in, including North Dakota.
- **Interagency Agreements:** On November 18, 2025, the USED announced that it would streamline education programs by creating six new partnerships to reduce federal bureaucracy and improve efficiency by shifting program management to agencies with specialized expertise. ESEA programs will be partnering with the Department of Labor. These changes aim to deliver better services for students, families, and schools by aligning programs. Wade Sick commented that for their Perkins funds, the administration of it has already been moved over to the Dept of Labor so their reporting to the Dept of Education hasn't changed. But when they request funds from the federal government to reimburse Perkins reimbursements, they now go through DOL grant management system and it has gone smoothly.
- **FY 2026 Appropriations - Funding Levels:** Continuing resolution expires January 30. The appropriations bill does provide increased certainty about timing of certain key formula grant awards. Congress did not approve the Administration's budget request proposal to consolidate 18 programs into a K-12 Simplified Funding Program, or to consolidate seven IDEA programs into

a revised state grant. Senate vote must occur (and pass) prior to January 30 or there will be another government shutdown. President Trump is expected to release FY 2027 budget proposal next month. NDDPI will continue to provide updates regarding allocations when we have any details.

- **FY 2026 Appropriations Statutory Language:** There was new language “The Secretary shall award to each State an amount as required under the applicable provisions of the ESEA, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, IDEA, Perkins Act, and AEFLA for each formula grant program to which funds are appropriated in this Act on the date such funds become available for obligation.” This gives us the assurance we will not have disruptions as we did last year.
- **2024 Census Data Published:** North Dakota received notice from the USED January 27, 2026 and will be sending out to districts next week. ED will use these 2024 district poverty and population estimates to calculate FY 2026 Title I, Part A allocations (school year 2026–2027). District leaders must review the memo and verify boundary survey data accuracy and report any concerns to the Census Bureau by March 27, 2026.
- **Title I Funding Task Force:** NDDPI adopted the USED methodology for Title I allocations alongside 40+ states and sought input and discussion to ensure the approach best meets ND's needs. The Task Force Included representatives from districts of varying sizes, and interested individuals met jointly with the Title I Committee of Practitioners (COP) four times in 2025.
- DPI met with the Committee of Practitioners on January 28 and we are working with Jamie Mertz, NDDPI CFO, to create a comparison chart with slightly different alternative poverty method that we compare to the US Dept of Ed method which is different than we had before. We are going to try a 50% census which is similar to Nebraska and then a 50% free, reduced lunch, and foster care formula. If needed, NDDPI will prepare a waiver request for USED but USED makes the final decision. No changes will be implemented in the 2026-2027 school year.

ESSA Plan Amendment Revised Timeline – Amanda Peterson

- Amanda shared a revised ESSA Amendment timeline which will give us another year to draft the ESSA Amendment and have consultation and feedback cycles administered to key stakeholders groups. It was thought to submit this in March because there are things that we want to put in place. But in the meantime, there has been change in leadership with Superintendent Bachmeier taking office and there may be additional sections that we may want to include if we are doing an amendment.
- Proposed ESSA Amendment Topic Areas
 - State Assessment Growth
 - Reading vs. ELA (*remove writing in the state assessment*)
 - Teacher Effectiveness
 - Accountability
 - K-8 School Quality/Student Success
 - English Learner Growth and overall percentage of the pie
 - Accountability for unique schools
 - Updates to TSI/CSI Identification based on established thresholds and criterion

- Proposed Growth Model – Stan Shauer: ESSA Implementation committee members and school leaders have repeatedly asked for a growth model that did the following things:
 - Should be easily understood by all education stakeholders.
 - Should be able to be replicated and calculated at the school and district level.
 - Should be useful at the state level for goal-setting.
- Proposed Growth Model – What:
 - **Shift from Median-Based to Movement-Based Growth**
 - Focus on individual student progress across micro performance levels rather than state median, making growth more easily understood and usable by all.
 - **Micro-Level Scoring System**
 - Assign points for movement within and across levels (e.g., +0.5 for small gains, +1.5 for major gains; negative points for declines).
 - **Statewide Impact & Visualization**
 - Aggregates easily for state-level reporting, supports ESSA goals, and can be visualized in charts for websites and reports.
 - **Flexible Design for ESSA Amendment**
 - Framework allows calibration without locking into extreme detail; supports simulation with historical data before implementation
- Stan reported that Dr. Martineau is a member of our TAC team and will not only bring in expertise at a doctorate level of education in human measurement, but also the work with many other states. In addition, the Center of Assessment was a great resource. We want to make that shift from a median-based to a movement-based growth, focusing on the individual student progress.
- Micro-Level Scoring System: Stan shared and explained his mock-up one-page Simple Formula Calculation Excel page of what that could look like. It also would be a similar tool used by schools to calculate their own growth, to make sure scoring is correct. Nothing is set in stone; we are merely looking for consensus and approval to move forward.
 - Ned Clooten asked if there were any cons. Stan said that any time you make a change, it's possible that there's going to be some people who benefit from it more than the previous. They might score some more points and some less points and that is why we like to run simulations because then we can look at if we stayed with the same growth.
 - Luke Schaefer mentioned that we are inherently in a perfect time and place where accountability was just run. Because of the fact that we just determined the three-year cohort of CSI schools, which means we wouldn't be determining the basis for our CSI schools and thereby our targeted schools that go along with them with some of the denominators. This is actually extremely timely because it would impact the smallest amount of schools possible.
- ESSA Implementation Vote – The following two items were put to vote on whether there was support moving forward with its development:
 - In favor of moving forward the proposed ESSA Amendment Timeline.
 - In favor of NDDPI developing the recommended K-8 State Assessment Growth Model.

- Educational Flexibility Program (Ed-Flex) – Amanda Peterson
 - Ed-Flex is an existing federal flexibility option that allows states to waive certain ESEA and Perkins requirements in exchange for accountability for student performance.
 - States with Ed-Flex authority can approve local waivers without prior USED approval, most commonly used for Title I carryover limits and Title IV spending flexibility.
 - 11 states currently hold this authority, and the authority lasts up to five years.
 - Ed-Flex does not permit waivers of core accountability or equity provisions—such as standards, assessments, maintenance of effort, comparability, or IDEA requirements.
 - North Dakota has previously operated under an Ed Flex waiver. Separate from an ESSA Plan Amendment, ND is always interested in pursuing flexibility options that help practitioners focus on student outcomes rather than burdensome compliance standards. As such, NDDPI is working internally to ensure that it is taking a comprehensive approach to evaluating the current ESEA statute in applicable federal programs, noticing where gaps occur and where flexibility might exist, and submitting a waiver to the USED, if appropriate

Superintendent Levi Bachmeier Welcome

- Two common themes Superintendent Bachmeier has been hearing on his school visits are:
 - 1) We crave stability. With a lot happening at the federal level, innovation and improvement is difficult without stability. Superintendent Bachmeier would rather do the Amendment once and it is then good for another ten years.
 - 2) We have to do better with our definition of Growth. If we want to lead the nation with America's best schools, one of the easiest ways to do that is to help ensure that outside stakeholders, parents, students, teachers can understand how these things are being measured.
- Superintendent Bachmeier thanked the committee members for the work that they do. We are all in this together and he is excited to be doing this work with these committee members.

Data Highlights – Stan Shauer

- The new ND A+ statewide assessment launched in 2024–25 with a new test provider, a fully updated platform, and a refreshed item bank aligned to the state's new academic standards.
- Students were assessed on new English and mathematics standards for the first time, meaning results create a baseline year for future comparisons.
- New cut scores established updated proficiency levels across subjects.
- Due to these significant changes, comparisons to previous years are not appropriate.
- The redesigned system will support richer data use over time, including comparisons across districts, schools, subjects, and student groups.
- Educators and families will receive clearer, more actionable information to support student goal-setting.
- NDDPI has made an important update to the labeling of one of the four student proficiency levels.
- Level 2 is now labeled “Approaching Proficiency.”
- This change is more than just a new name - it reflects our continued focus on student growth, progress, and potential.

- Rather than framing achievement as a proficient/not proficient outcome, the new label emphasizes that students at this level can do many things and are on a path toward meeting grade-level expectations.
- The percentage of students identified as Choice Ready increased from 71% (2023–24) to 73% (2024–25).
- After a 1% decrease from 22-23 to 23-24, the four-year graduation rate improved by 2%.
- The graduation rate of Native American students improved by 7% from last year.

TSI/CSI/ND First Update – Amanda Peterson

- Amanda shared that the purpose of Accountability is to provide statewide responsibility to all stakeholders to pursue the ND PK-12 strategic vision. She shared the PK-12 Strategic Vision Framework/ESSA Accountability Crosswalk, the 2025-2026 TSI/CSI/ND First Identification Timeline, and the list of TSI and CSI schools.
- Based on the enrollment of identified schools, 9,113 students will be served through NDDPI school improvement support and funds, which amounts to 8% of ND public school students. Four TSI schools moved to CSI, nine CSI schools moved into ND FIRST.
- ND FIRST builds on North Dakota's existing school improvement system, providing added oversight and support for schools in their second CSI cycle, identified for the first time in November 2025. Through this multi-year process, schools continue their improvement efforts, track progress, and work toward exiting the ND FIRST designation using success measures developed with NDDPI and outlined in the Collaborative Partnership Agreement.
- NDDPI sent out alert memos to anyone in the Bottom 20% pool, as well as celebration memos to those who scored in the Top 10% using accountability metrics. Those who received the “alert” memo, could be identified as TSI or CSI in the future, if they are consistently underperforming. Memos were sent to 46 schools, 32 at the Elementary/Middle level and 14 at the High School level.

CTE Perkins Consolidated Annual Report – Wayde Sick

- Wade Sick presented the Perkins Consolidated Annual Report which covers July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025 and is due January 31, 2026. He shared data from the report and some data is not finalized yet. Wade reviewed total enrollment overview for 2023-25, students who have taken at least one CTE course, and CTE clusters.
- There are 35 secondary Perkins Eligible Recipients in the form of Perkins Consortiums (23) or single school districts (12) that receive Perkins funding. For each eligible recipient, targets were set for the seven performance measures.
- At the state level, they have met all their performance targets.
- There are ten postsecondary Perkins Eligible Recipients, three in the form of a Perkins Consortium, and seven single post-secondary institutions that receive Perkins Act Funding. For each eligible recipient, targets were set for the three performance measures.
- CTE data is also on Insights.

Sharing Meeting Information

- Luke Schafer inquired about the expectation of the committee members to share the minutes and information with the roles they represent here. Amanda said that each member can and should share the information from these meetings. Everything is public information.

Closing: Amanda Peterson made closing comments and reviewed potential agenda items for the next meeting. If anyone has any agenda topics or would like to share anything relevant to your work, please contact Amanda.

Potential March/April Topics:

- Federal Update
- ESSA Plan Amendment Progress
- ND FIRST Update
- Student Engagement Data Presentation
- Choice Ready Update

Meeting adjourned: 10:40 am CDT