



K-12 Education Coordination Full Council Meeting Minutes

Location: RM 210/212
2nd Floor, State Capitol Building
600 E Broadway Ave, Bismarck
& via Microsoft Teams
Thursday, June 5, 2025

K-12 Council Members Present:

Chairman Luke Schaefer, Brandt Dick, Maria Neset, Jeremy Mehlhoff, Melissa Vollmer, Sarah Ricks, Nick Archuleta

K-12 Council Members Present Virtually:

Sonia Meehl, Sara Medalen, Justin Fryer

K-12 Council Members Absent:

Marc Bluestone Sr., Senator Donald Schaible, Representative Pat Heinert, Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, Lucas Greff, Senator Ryan Braunberger, Jared Bollom, Angel Lindseth

Others Present: Mark Vollmer (K12 Council Executive Director), Shauna Marchus (NDDPI Admin), Donna Fishbeck (Designee for Supt. Baesler), Matt Menge (Asst. Attorney General), Dawn Ulmer (Designee for NDCTE), Amanda Peterson (NDDPI)

Others Present Virtually: Jamie Mertz (CFO, NDDPI)

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Luke Schaefer at 1:05 p.m. CDT

1. Approval of Minutes: November 19, 2024 – Full Council Meeting

Nick Archuleta moved to approve the November 19, 2024 minutes, and Sarah Ricks seconded the motion. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Introductions - New Council Members

Chair Schaefer called for roll call attendance. Each member introduced themselves and stated their role on the Council. Shauna Marchus announced that a new Microsoft Team will be created for K12 Council members to access meeting materials for all future meetings.

3. Review Legislative Impact

Chair Schaefer noted that a bill proposing a study on new teacher resources, which included areas such as financial planning, health insurance options, and child care was not approved as a formal legislative study, but a legislator suggested it could be considered by the Council.

Mark Vollmer and Matt Menge discussed the passage of Senate Bill 2262, which gives the K-12 Coordination Council authority to enter into third-party contracts for educational studies. The group reviewed a list of legislative studies and discussed studies related to K12 education. It was noted that with a \$60,000 budget for studies, future studies will likely combine internal efforts with outside assistance.

Jamie Mertz stated that once the Council identifies one or two studies to pursue, the State Procurement Office (SPO) can assist in ensuring compliance with procurement laws. He noted that the Council will need to work directly with the SPO for support. He explained that studies costing under \$10,000 do not require a formal procurement process, those between \$10,000 and \$25,000 require three bids, and anything over \$25,000 must go through a Request for Proposal (RFP).

Mark Vollmer reported that SB2263, which would have provided grant money to school districts to support mastery frameworks and innovation within schools, did not pass.

4. Student Engagement Survey Results – Amanda Peterson (NDDPI)

Chair Schaefer reviewed the ND Strategic Vision Framework as an introduction to Amanda Peterson's presentation on the Student Engagement survey results from this year.

Amanda Peterson reviewed new student engagement data, noting positive trends, including increases in all three categories of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement and a decrease in student disengagement. She noted that the survey showed statistically meaningful gains. The behavioral engagement data was highlighted as exceeding the goal for 2025 and 2026.

The group discussed that behavioral engagement was chosen as the focus for aspirational goals because it directly reflects students' actions in school, like attendance, participation, and conduct, which align with safe and healthy behavior indicators. This choice was especially relevant post-pandemic, as schools focused on helping students readjust. It was noted that while cognitive and emotional engagement are also important, behavior was seen as a strong indicator of both student well-being and classroom involvement. She highlighted that educators are more focused on data-driven decisions, and even small gains in engagement are seen as meaningful progress.

Amanda Peterson discussed the revised student engagement survey, which has been used by a few pilot schools. She noted issues with the past survey, including difficult vocabulary for younger students, lower engagement among middle schoolers due to age-related factors, and challenges in gathering parent feedback, and discussed how the new survey hopes to address these issues. The group also highlighted that once the data is finalized, a cohesive communication plan will be important.

5. Small Groups: Focus areas for 2025-27 Council – ‘Students In School’

Chair Schaefer proposed an overall theme of “**Students in School**” and explained that the focus was intended to center on improving attendance, engagement, motivation, and behavior, and aimed at ensuring students are present and successful in school. In the small groups, subcommittee members were tasked with:

- Exploring how their work could support this theme.
- Considering if another theme might be more impactful.

Members were encouraged to consider what it means to create environments that are welcoming, supportive, and conducive to student success including evaluating support for families, improving student motivation, and enhancing overall school engagement. Chair Schaefer noted there is a growing urgency to address student-centered challenges.

The group transitioned into small groups with their subcommittees to discuss a potential focus theme for 2025–2027. When the full group came back together, each subcommittee chair reported their proposed new scope of work for the biennium:

Aspirational Goals:

Chair Schafer noted that many of the aspirational goals are term ending in the 2025-26 school year, so he acknowledged the need for a review of all goals this year. He reported that the main focus would be:

- Review and update goals
- Recommend possible new goals for strategic vision outcomes: Mathematics and Attendance.

He then mentioned additional areas the subcommittee would focus on, if time allows, including:

- Identifying best practices in schools that can be highlighted statewide
- Exploring correlations between chronic absenteeism and student engagement,
- Examining correlations between student engagement and the other goals

Statewide Projects, Duplication, Replication:

Brandt Dick summarized his group's discussion on barriers to student attendance and engagement. They identified transportation, demographics, and family challenges as major factors, and explored how options like virtual learning might affect attendance. They emphasized the need to examine potential overlap or gaps in services among agencies, and whether existing supports are known or accessible to schools and families. Additionally, concerns about data privacy laws like FERPA as possible obstacles to community-based solutions. Members also raised the idea that community agencies may be unaware of the attendance crisis and could potentially offer more support if properly informed.

The group proposed a central question to guide their work: *What statewide agencies and support systems exist to address barriers and help ensure students stay engaged in and attending school?*

Support and Innovation:

Sarah Ricks summarized that her subcommittee explored factors that encourage students to attend school. They emphasized the importance of identifying and understanding what schools with consistently strong, or recently improved attendance, student engagement, and family involvement are doing well. Their goal is to document and disseminate these effective practices, potentially through a statewide database. She also noted that a unique topic raised was the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on student engagement. Members noted AI is already influencing how students learn and interact with school, and they recommended further inquiry into how this evolving

technology might reshape student motivation and productivity in both positive and negative ways.

- Identify model/exemplar schools or districts for high achievement and high growth in the areas of student attendance, family engagement, and student engagement. Identify what policies, practices, and features have led to success in those schools or districts. Create a plan for sharing those successes within the state.
- Investigate how "Learn Everywhere" is being utilized in the state and what impact it may have on students in school.
- Investigate how AI may impact student engagement in school.
- Continue to look for schools engaging with mastery frameworks in the state.

A discussion was held regarding the concept of "Learn Everywhere" and some questioned how it impacts definitions of school attendance and student engagement. Members noted that students may still be learning outside of traditional school settings, such as through CTE or sports, and emphasized the need for clear accountability measures for such learning. The group acknowledged the variation in attendance barriers between elementary (more parent-driven) and secondary levels (more motivation-driven), highlighting the importance of age-specific approaches. The topic was considered valuable for further exploration by the Support and Innovation subcommittee.

Chair Schaefer summarized the subcommittee discussions into three main approaches and noted that these directions were distinct yet complementary, allowing the groups to work without duplication:

- (1) identifying and refining goals, with a focus on student engagement
- (2) examining barriers to attendance, motivation, and engagement
- (3) identifying motivating factors and successful practices that promote student success

Chair Schaefer explained that they will be assigning members to subcommittees for the upcoming biennium in the next few weeks. All subcommittee chairs will stay the same. Chair Schaefer requested that all members consider the new focus areas and reflect on which subcommittee their skills and interests align with most. All members were instructed to email Mark Vollmer and Luke Schaefer with their preferred subcommittee selection, along with a brief explanation of why they believe it is a good fit for them. Once all submissions are received, new subcommittee assignments will be posted soon thereafter.

The subcommittees' next steps include scheduling monthly meetings to define key driving questions, determine two-year goals, and identify success measures.

6. Process for Hot Topics

Chair Schaefer asked the group for any hot topics. Several key issues were raised, including:

- **House Bill 1556 & Children's Cabinet:**
Maria Neset reported that the bill shifted oversight of the Children's Cabinet from the Health and Human Services (HHS) department to the administration of the Governor's Office. This cross-branch cabinet (including judicial, executive, and legislative members) is now leading efforts related to supporting students with severe behavioral needs and overseeing psychiatric residential placements. HHS

has been tasked with creating a simplified “cheat sheet” visual flow chart for school districts intended to help schools more easily navigate the complex process of accessing behavioral health services, particularly in crisis situations. It is expected to be completed by the end of August or early September to align with the start of the school year. Maria Neset will keep this Council updated with that work.

- **Health Insurance & Teacher Retention (House Bill 1510):**

Maria Neset mentioned a growing concern over teacher retention and recruitment, particularly around rising healthcare costs. She explained that HB1510 included a legislative study to explore how school funding, especially health insurance spending, could be optimized to better support salaries and retention. The goal was to explore shifting resources from high-cost insurance to salary-based compensation to aid recruitment and retention. Though the bill failed in the Senate, the issue has resurfaced frequently.

- **Charter Schools**

The group briefly discussed the Charter School Bill. Donna Fishbeck reported that NDDPI is working on the framework, and the admin rules should be developed this fall. Chair Schaefer explained that this issue is influential enough for the K12 Council to plan to respond collectively.

- **Property Tax**

The impact of property tax and the proposed 3% tax cap was briefly discussed.

7. Possible Studies Discussion

- **HB 1129**

Chair Schaefer noted that one study has already been assigned to the Council, regarding House Bill 1129: Student attendance and absenteeism. He explained that the first phase will focus on student attendance, absenteeism, and chronic absenteeism in K-12, analyzing existing data and identifying any additional qualitative or quantitative data to identify schools with high attendance rates. The second phase will involve identifying effective strategies used by high-performing schools, with the goal of sharing these best practices broadly.

- **Maximizing Impact/Teacher Benefits & Health Benefits**

Chair Schaefer also mentioned studying maximizing impact with respect to health benefits and other employee benefits.

- **Impact of Preschool on Student Outcomes**

Sara Medalen suggested studying the impact of preschool on student outcomes. Maria Neset noted that this topic will be addressed by a Children's Cabinet sub-workgroup, led by the Lieutenant Governor, and will focus on early learning and childhood development.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:23 pm.

Minutes taken and prepared by Shauna Marchus