



## K-12 Education Coordination Full Council Meeting Minutes

Location: CTE Conference Room  
15<sup>th</sup> Floor, State Capitol Building  
600 E Broadway Ave, Bismarck  
& via Microsoft Teams  
Tuesday, September 10, 2024

### **K-12 Council Members Present:**

Chairman Luke Schaefer, Brandt Dick, Maria Neset, Jeremy Mehlhoff, Senator Ryan Braunberger, Jared Bollom, Melissa Vollmer, Sonia Meehl, Sara Medalen, Beth Slette, Representative Pat Heinert, Nick Archuleta, Justin Fryer,

### **K-12 Council Members Present Virtually:**

Lucas Greff, Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck, Maria Neset

### **K-12 Council Members Absent:**

Marc Bluestone Sr. Senator Donald Schaible

**Others Present:** Dr. Mark Vollmer (Executive Director), Shauna Marchus (NDDPI Admin), Dr. Cory Steiner, Bob Lafavor (DPI IT)

### **Others Present Virtually:**

Aimee Copas (NDCEL), Donna Fishbeck (NDDPI Chief of Staff)

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

### **1. Approval of Meeting Previous Minutes: April 12, 2024**

Sonia Meehl moved to approve the minutes as amended from the April 12, 2024 Full Council meeting. Jeremy Mehlhoff seconded the motion. Chair Schaefer noted that there will be a shift in style of meeting minutes which will focus more on summarizing actions taken and general discussions moving forward. The motion carried unanimously.

Chair Schaefer introduced Dr. Mark Volmer as the new Executive Director, replacing Kayla Effertz Kleven. Dr. Volmer briefly shared his extensive experience as a Superintendent, and he expressed excitement about joining the Council.

### **2. Incentivizing Innovation in K12 – Dr. Cory Steiner**

Dr. Cory Steiner, the Superintendent for the Northern Cass School District, presented a proposed model by 2Revolutions that helps schools implement new learning models for educational innovation by putting learners at the center. He noted that current school systems are time-based rather than learner-driven, and prioritize knowledge acquisition over the practical application of knowledge, skills, and mindsets. He outlined a transformation strategy with the development of a Portrait of an Educator and a Portrait of a Leader. He

described a model with a dedicated research and design team that would be responsible for implementing a system-wide approach to education innovation which involves bi-monthly teaching sessions and additional on-site sessions where practices are observed and refined. He noted that this continuous cycle of teaching, observation, and feedback aims to ensure sustained implementation and accountability. He concluded his presentation by stating that with appropriate support and resources, schools can lead in innovation, improving educational outcomes across the state while maintaining local control.

The group discussed teacher stress related to new programs, with Dr. Steiner noting that balancing autonomy, student focus, and recognition helps maintain morale. He mentioned that teachers engaged in innovative practices showed higher satisfaction and better outcomes, despite challenges. Further discussion revealed that innovative education examples have yielded strong results, with most state assessment areas above average. It was discussed how to provide skills to teachers to engage in learner-centered practices, ensure leaders are vetted, trained, and focused on kids, and then evaluate results to ensure change is successful. Another key discussion was the cost and time commitment of this program and how to implement it across North Dakota. Dr. Steiner proposed a competitive application process that includes memorandums of understanding, with full initial funding and subsequent cost-sharing by districts. He also suggested involving districts in coaching roles to create a pipeline to teaching, which he estimated could take a two-year time commitment. Rep. Schreiber-Beck raised concerns about student behavior, mental health, and absenteeism, requesting more recent data. Dr. Steiner agreed to seek updated information. Finally, the role of school counselors was discussed, and it was noted that they are important in enhancing student engagement and support.

Jennifer Weber emphasized that the Council's main task is to decide whether to support a bill for this initiative. Chair Schaefer noted that the Council will take formal action on this initiative in November when the group develops final recommendations.

### **3. Review K12 Council Operations Guidelines**

Chair Schaefer reviewed three recommended changes to the K12 operations guidelines that the Executive Committee is seeking approval for from the full Council.

1. Chair Schaefer highlighted the recommendation to update the duties of the executive director regarding the use of allocated funds. The proposed language changes include removing lines a, b, and c, then adding the language “The executive director shall consult with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and then forward the funding requests to the K12 Council Executive Committee for review”, and keep the language “when possible, NDDPI will provide payment through its invoicing process”. Chair Schaefer noted that this addresses the Council’s authority regarding allocating funds. He explained that recent legislative changes removed the budget line item for the K12 Council, shifting the financial responsibility to the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). This funding shift requires a new process to ensure proper budget alignment and payment for the needs of the Council. Mark Vollmer clarified that the goal is not for DPI to be able to dismiss ideas but for the Council and DPI to engage in early discussions about potential funding instead of the Council presenting a finalized idea and then seeking funds.
2. Chair Schaefer explained that the Executive Committee also recommends removing the operation guideline in section O that states, “The executive director shall not testify on behalf of the Council.” He noted that this restriction was initially imposed because the

first executive director was also a lobbyist, which could have created a conflict of interest, but that restriction is no longer necessary.

3. Chair Schaefer added that the Executive Committee also recommends updating the chairperson's duties in Item C, including removing the language "The chairperson shall serve as the spokesperson for the Council," and changing it to read "The chairperson shall collaborate with the executive director to act as spokesperson for the Council." This would mean that both the chairperson and the executive director will work together to represent the Council in public communications, including testimonies and media interactions.

There was a discussion about whether the executive director would need to register as a lobbyist if he were to present on behalf of the Council. It was noted that while presenting general information might not require lobbyist registration, seeking funds or advocating for specific recommendations could. To ensure compliance, it was suggested that the Council consult the Attorney General. Additionally, the possibility of needing to revise the guidelines if a new Executive Director is hired in the future was also considered. The consensus of the group was to defer any changes to the guidelines until clarification is obtained.

#### **4. Review Makeup of Council Representatives**

Chair Schaefer asked the group to review the Council's membership to ensure appropriate representation from all education sectors. Jennifer Weber proposed adding a higher education representative, possibly from NDACTE. Maria Neset proposed adding a student voice, and the group suggested choosing someone from the Superintendent's Student Cabinet. Chair Schaefer noted that these additions will be voted on at the November meeting.

#### **5. Governor's Teacher Recruitment & Retention Task Force Update**

Maria Neset provided a link to a PDF on the governor's website containing meeting agendas, task force packets, and recording links. She noted that the final meeting of the task force took place on August 28<sup>th</sup> and involved difficult discussions on prioritizing the task force's work. She highlighted that the task force's role was not to solve the problem but to focus on foundational aspects and narrow down priorities to elevate practices, funding sources, or opportunities that are working to support teachers. She highlighted that the final recommendation document with a list of priorities that the task force voted on will be coming out at the end of September. She outlined the next steps explaining that the Governor and Superintendent Baesler will receive the final report; the Governor will determine which priorities he wants to move forward; if an item has a fiscal note he will put it in his legislative budget, and then figure out legislative partners to propose policy or legislative changes.

[https://www.governor.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/Teacher%20Retention%20Task%20Force/Public%20Announcement\\_ND\\_8.28.24.pdf](https://www.governor.nd.gov/sites/www/files/documents/Teacher%20Retention%20Task%20Force/Public%20Announcement_ND_8.28.24.pdf)

#### **6. Legislative Interim Update**

Rep Heinert noted that one proposal that stood out was considering new approaches to funding school busing. He explained that currently, busing is often funded based on remaining funds divided by mileage, but there's a proposal to integrate busing costs into the budget formula from the start.

He mentioned another proposed idea: creating a specialized bus license that would bypass some federal requirements for air brake systems. However, this concept would not allow

drivers to drive on the interstate, and drivers with this restricted license could only transfer students to school districts.

## **7. Educational Opportunities Task Force Update**

Rep. Heinert noted that the North Dakota Educational Opportunities Task Force has been discussing a potential tiered system for all North Dakota students, not just those in public schools but all schools, including home school. He mentioned that there has been discussions in the committee about starting an Education Savings Account (ESA) program; however, these ideas are still in the discussion phase, with no formal plans or documents yet.

Superintendent Baesler shared that the North Dakota Educational Opportunities Task Force is hosting four virtual listening sessions to gather input. Two sessions will be for educational stakeholders, including family members, while the other two will be open to the general public. She noted that participants can register via a link on the Secretary of State's website.

## **8. Subcommittee Reports / Recommendations:**

**a) Executive Committee:** Their recent focus on K12 Council operations language was discussed previously in this meeting.

**b) Support and Innovation:** Sarah Ricks reported that the Support and Innovation subcommittee worked with Anne Ellefson from the Personalized Learning Network to better understand the systems in place and ensure the draft language effectively supports districts. She stated that this subcommittee plans to present an updated draft language in November. She noted that the subcommittee also focused on key elements for advancing this work, including standards, a strong 'why', a culture of risk, visionary leadership, and dedicated time to do the work. She mentioned that they are exploring successful practices for retaining educational support staff and examining issues related to finding substitute teachers to give time to do the work. She also discussed how they picked up the work Duplication & Replication subcommittee started around retaining educational support staff. She noted that the Support and Innovation subcommittee has met with Dr. Shockley to identify successful retention practices and has received some areas of interest to do a deeper dive into to try to identify lessons from the schools that are experiencing success in this area. She also noted that they started to investigate the substitute teacher shortage, and are working to find out if it's already being addressed elsewhere in the state.

### **c) Statewide Projects, Replication, and Duplication**

Brandt Dick reported that the Statewide Projects, Replication, and Duplication subcommittee's previous meetings reviewed updates from EduTech and cybersecurity efforts to help students meet the new requirement. They also reviewed the State Longitudinal Data System's work on helping students advance and prepare for college. Moving forward, the subcommittee aims to consult with the new executive director to refocus their efforts and determine the next steps.

### **d) Review of Initiatives**

Jen Weber reported that this subcommittee reviewed two resources: Varsity Tutors and Scribble. She summarized that Varsity Tutors offers free access to on-demand tutoring, essay review, study halls, and test prep, with additional paid features. She explained that Scribble is a cloud-based app for research and writing, integrating tools for annotation,

citation and AI use monitoring. She noted that this also has a free version available to districts, with optional paid upgrades.

The Council found these resources beneficial but considered how to best inform districts about them. They also explored the Council's role in promoting vendors. Concerns were raised about screen time and the effectiveness of these tools in real-world applications. Members discussed how to approach educational initiatives and vendor reviews moving forward and whether to endorse or simply report on such resources. Superintendent Baesler explained that when testifying before the Appropriations Committee, she often receives inquiries from legislators about whether a particular initiative has been vetted or is widely desired. She noted that she frequently has had to indicate that there has not been any discussion or validation, and legislators have expressed that they rely on the K12 Coordination Council as a resource for gathering educator insights on various initiatives, which helps them make informed decisions and vote effectively during busy legislative sessions. Superintendent Baesler noted that the Council's role is critical in providing information that influences legislative support or opposition to education initiatives. Chair Schaefer added that if action is required, the K12 Coordination Council's feedback on an initiative will be crucial, and Superintendent Baesler will provide the Council's perspective when legislators seek it.

It was proposed that guidance regarding vendors could include a requirement for educational programs to be piloted in a North Dakota school district before being considered for statewide adoption, ensuring their effectiveness. The importance of an independent review to mitigate vendor bias was also stressed. Superintendent Baesler pointed out that North Dakota's smaller student population might face challenges in piloting large-scale initiatives, which could limit student opportunities. Jen Weber mentioned that while the current volume of vendor requests is manageable, she is open to making adjustments if circumstances change.

**e) Aspirational Goals**

Superintendent Baesler reported that the subcommittee has successfully implemented its aspirational goals onto the public-facing dashboard ([insights.nd.gov](https://insights.nd.gov)) as of early summer. She reviewed each ND Long-Term Strategic goal and the data percentages for the Statewide 2023-2024 school year:

- Reading Proficiency in 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade: The goal was 68.3%, and the actual is 43.4%. There was a movement away from the goal of .2% from last year.
- Expected Learning Gains: The ELA goal was 57.4%, and the actual is 55.4%. It was noted that ND is only 3% away from the goal and trending in the right direction in ELA. The math goal was 52.5 %, and the actual is 48.4%.
- Student Engagement: Superintendent Baesler stated that this is the most concerning goal because the trajectory has significantly dropped since the pandemic. She mentioned that they believe engagement is a leading indicator of attendance. The goal was 146, and the actual is 139.
- Graduate Choice Ready: Superintendent Baesler stated that this result has had the best growth and is above the goal percentage. She noted that in the 2015-16 school year, only about 23% of graduating students were deemed "choice ready," meaning they met the baseline requirements for at least two of the three post-secondary readiness areas: workforce, military, or further education. The goal for this year was 63.1%, and the actual is 70.6%.

- Reduce Disparitiy: Superintendent Baesler noted that achievement gaps persist for students with disabilities, low-income students, and Native American students. She explained that this graph is different than the other chards in that the percentage should be lower (descending) to reflect the reduction of disparity.
  - Disabilities: The ELA goal was 57.8%, and the actual is 84.1%. The math goal was 58.4%, and the actual is 85.3%.
  - Students in Poverty: The ELA goal was 30.6%, and the actual is 68.3%. The math goal was 32.8%, and the actual is 75.1%.
  - Native American: The ELA goal was 33.2%, and the actual is 70.1%. The math oal was 36.3%, and the actual is 80.0%.

Superintendent Baesler noted that to achieve our statewide strategic goals, it's crucial that individual school districts also work towards these objectives. There has been discussion of providing local districts with tools to track and communicate district-level progress towards these goals. She noted that this will be a topic of conversation at the upcoming Aspirational Goals Subcommittee meeting.

Sara Medalen commented on the engagement gap results and questioned whether schools using personalized learning show higher engagement rates. Superintendent Baesler confirmed that personalized learning does correlate with better engagement, and while Northern Cass effectively utilizes this approach, there is not a large enough pool of schools to make definitive claims. Superintendent Baesler suggested that providing schools with clear, visual data on engagement could help them assess their performance and identify successful strategies, and this localized data could guide efforts to replicate successful practices across the state.

Chair Schaefer recommended that Mark Vollmer analyze engagement data for personalized learning, using the personalized learning network from the past six to seven years.

A question was raised about whether a Council member could switch subcommittees, and Chair Schaefer recommended that anyone interested in switching contact Mark Vollmer.

## **9. Legislative Role of the K12 Education Coordination Council**

Chair Schaefer notified the group that during the interim report, a legislator asked why the Council was voting in consensus, meaning recommendations can only move forward if all members agree. He noted that a legislator raised concerns about this method and suggested that it seems limiting that one person could block a majority-supported recommendation, leading to legislators not hearing good ideas. Chair Schafer introduced the idea of potentially changing this process to present a recommendation with the vote tally, indicating who was in favor and who opposed, along with any dissenting opinions. He noted that if this Council were to adopt this new procedure, it would require establishing new guidelines for the Council. He then opened the floor for thoughts and concerns regarding this topic as they prepare for their November voting.

Discussion was held about the pros and cons of both voting methods. Some questioned whether there had been significant issues in the past that failed to pass a recommendation due to consensus voting style, and if not, there's not a reason for changing it. Some acknowledged that while consensus voting generally works, there may be instances where strong opinions exist, and consensus cannot be reached so that a tally could be beneficial.

Council members expressed that consensus voting strengthens the group and prevents division, although it was noted that a minority voice should not hold back a good idea. It was emphasized that consensus does not require universal agreement but rather a collective commitment to move an idea forward without sabotaging it. Members also noted that legislators can still introduce bills independently of the Council's consensus. The group will revisit this for a vote at the November meeting.

Chair Schaefer emphasized that during legislative sessions, the K12 Education Coordination Council operates with a unified voice based on recommendations made in their November meeting. Individual members cannot speak on legislation unless it is something directly from the Council.

Chair Schaefer emphasized that the K12 Education Coordination Council must decide its role for the upcoming legislative session: whether to make recommendations in November and remain passive or to respond to legislative requests. After deliberation, the consensus was that their current workload and limited capacity would not allow them to effectively engage with every legislative request, especially given the increasing number of bills being introduced. Thus, they decided to maintain their approach of making recommendations and refraining from further involvement during the legislative session.

## **10. Timely Topics**

Chair Schaefer explained "timely topics" as a space for brief discussions, not deep learning or decision-making. He encouraged members to suggest topics to maintain this practice in future meetings.

Superintendent Baesler raised two key topics for discussion: the potential for cell phone-free days and a focus on engagement to improve attendance rather than just addressing chronic absenteeism.

There was a group discussion centered on the distractions caused by cell phones in schools, and how teachers are seeking administrative support to manage the issue. Superintendent Baesler noted that various governors are taking action on a state level regarding cell phone policies in schools, with mixed responses from local districts. Some superintendents desire unified state policies, while others advocate for local control. Superintendent Baesler noted that parents' feedback revealed concern for cell phone policies because they want assurance of their children's safety during lockdowns and other incidents and the ability to communicate directly with their children when necessary. She emphasized the importance of involving law enforcement in school safety communications to address parental concerns noting that the message of cell phone limitations, delivered by first responders rather than school leaders, resonated more with parents. It was discussed that reports show a link between limited cell phone access and improved academic performance. Members also discussed a book that has sparked national interest called "The Anxiety Generation," focusing on mental health rather than education, noting that students are often disengaged due to worries about social media and negative online interactions, which could be limited with cell phone restrictions in school.

The group also discussed attendance policies and the various factors contributing to student absenteeism, such as transportation challenges, parental mental health, economic hardships, and caregiving responsibilities at home. Superintendent Baesler highlighted a growing casual attitude among some parents who no longer prioritize school attendance, which increases pressure on teachers. Some members raised concerns about attendance

for students aged 16 and older, highlighting reduced support for absenteeism as education becomes non-compulsory. It was mentioned that ongoing attendance issues could be stemming from COVID-19 guidelines that encouraged students to stay home, which may still be affecting attendance rates. Superintendent Baesler noted discussions in conservative states about shifting from average daily membership to average daily attendance for funding. The group considered the potential advantages of attendance-based funding, which could motivate schools to improve attendance, though it might divert resources from academic support. It was noted that student feedback indicates a desire for relevant and engaging content to encourage attendance. Rep. Schreiber-Beck added that nationwide attendance issues are prevalent, linking them to generational shifts in work ethic and attitudes toward illness post-pandemic. Superintendent Baesler emphasized the need for a study to explore geographic variations and root causes of absenteeism in North Dakota's education system to consider policy creation rather than simply following other states' trends.

**Next Full Council Meeting: November 13, 2024 - Capitol Bldg., 15<sup>th</sup> Floor CTE Conference Room**

Shauna Marchus informed the Council that their November Full Council meeting would fulfill their statutory requirement of six meetings per biennium. She asked if they wanted to meet in 2025 and the Council members decided to schedule one more Full Council meeting after the legislative session in May or June 2025. A scheduling poll will be sent out to determine a meeting date.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

ATTEST:

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Chairman Luke Schaefer

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Date

Minutes taken and prepared by Shauna Marchus