

**STATE BOARD OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
April 22, 2024**

State Board of Public School Education members met in the CTE 15<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room at the State Capitol and via Teams on Monday, April 22, 2024. The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Sonia Meehl at 1:01 pm.

**State Board Members in Attendance:**

Chair Sonia Meehl  
Board Member Josh Johnson  
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom  
Board Member Burdell Johnson (left early)

**State Board Member Present Virtually:**

Vice Chairman Mike McHugh (left early)  
Board Member Eric Nelson  
Superintendent Kirsten Baesler (left early)

**Others in Attendance:** Allyson Hicks (Asst. States Atty), Shauna Marchus (NDDPI Admin), Janet O'Hara (RRVEC Director)

**Others Present Virtually:** Adam Tescher (NDDPI), Melissa Hamilton, Stacey Poffenberger (NDDPI MIS), Ben Schafer (GNWEC), Riley Mattson (RESP)

**1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – February 26, 2024**

Lyndsi Engstrom moved to approve the minutes from the February 26, 2024 - regular meeting. Burdell Johnson seconded the motion. No discussion. The motion carried unanimously.

**2. Final approval of the draft Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and Order for the Dissolution of the Bakker Public School District #10 of Emmons County in North Dakota to Strasburg Public School District #15 of Emmons County in North Dakota.**

Josh Johnson moved to approve the final Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Order for the dissolution of the Bakker Public School District #10 in Emmons County, ND to Strasburg School District in Emmons County, ND. Lyndsi Engstrom seconded. No discussion.

NAME	VOTE (Yes/ No)
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Josh Johnson	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes

Board Member Burdell Johnson	Yes
Superintendent Kirsten Baesler	Absent – No Vote
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

Motion passed 6-0.

### 3. **Appointments to the Grand Forks Air Force Base School Board**

Chair Meehl stated there were two nominees submitted for the Grand Forks Air Force Base (GFAFB) School Board, Mr. Branden Shepperd and Mr. Terry Snider. She explained the process for appointment to this school board and noted the candidate's appointment is subject to the final approval of the State Board of Public School Education.

Burdell Johnson moved to approve the two candidates, Branden Shepperd and Terry Snider, for the GFAFB School Board. Eric Nelson seconded. No discussion.

NAME	VOTE (Yes/ No)
Board Member Burdell Johnson	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes
Board Member Josh Johnson	Yes
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Superintendent Kirsten Baesler	Yes
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

Motion passed 7-0. Chair Meehl stated that Branden Shepperd and Terry Snider were hereby appointed to the Grand Forks Air Force Base School Board.

### 4. **Annexation Training Manual and County Superintendent Training Update – Allyson Hicks**

Assistant States Attorney Allyson Hicks presented a draft of an annexation manual. She noted that annexations are just one part of the duties of county superintendents, but they are the largest part of what this board is involved in, and the largest duty of the County Superintendents' role that has the most confusion, so the manual was created to provide guidance and samples of the annexation process. She mentioned that this manual does not address reorganizations or dissolutions or any of the other duties of County Superintendents.

Allyson Hicks explained that while this manual was drafted by the AG's office, it is considered a board-created document, and the board's approval of its content is necessary. Allyson Hicks welcomed any feedback from the board members. Discussion was held amongst the group regarding the manual.

Josh Johnson expressed gratitude for the effort put into creating this manual and stated that he believes it will benefit county superintendents and others by addressing frequently asked questions about annexations and streamlining the process.

Lyndsi Engstrom asked if the county superintendents have been asked for feedback on this manual. Allyson Hicks explained that this is only a draft, and the board's approval of the comprehensive version of this document is required before distribution. She explained that at the last legislative session, DPI and the State Board of Public School Education were statutorily required to give training to county superintendents. She added that this document will be utilized in the training this summer, feedback will be gathered from county superintendents then, and the manual can be updated if needed.

Lyndsi Engstrom asked if there were plans to create similar resources for dissolutions and reorganizations. Allyson Hicks noted that she prioritized addressing the pressure item of annexations first, but offered to draft a manual for those items if the board wishes.

Sonia Meehl asked the board members to review the document and send any feedback to Allyson Hicks as soon as possible; then, the board will review and vote to approve the full document at the next State Board meeting.

Eric Nelson thanked Allyson Hicks for putting this together, applauded the effort, and thinks it's a great resource for the citizens of the state.

Board Member Burdell Johnson left the meeting at 1:23 pm.

Vice Chair Mike McHugh left the meeting at 1:38 pm.

## **5. REA Presentations:**

### **a. Red River Valley Education Cooperative (RRVEC) – Janet O'Hara**

Janet O'Hara presented an overview of RRVEC, including their 21 districts, 45 schools, staff, and governing board. She noted that there has been 50% turnover in superintendents. She reviewed RRVEC's mission, vision, and goals and gave a brief overview of their audit report and other fiscal information. She discussed initiatives such as self-directed personal development opportunities and highlighted efforts to create presentations, proficiency scales, and lesson examples for computer science and cybersecurity standards. She gave an overview of their involvement in addressing emerging educational technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI). She acknowledged challenges such as equitable funding, the impact of staffing limitations, and the added challenge of intensive support for TSI/CSI schools. She also highlighted their successes as tailored support to a wide variety of schools, strong relationships amongst small schools leveraging opportunities, and collaboration with Higher Ed. Lastly, she shared insights into their therapy dog program, highlighting its positive effects on students and the community.

Josh Johnson commented on the uniqueness of the REAs that is evident in presentations. He asked if RRVEC conducted any surveys with its members. Janet O'Hara confirmed the use of needs assessment surveys to gauge the needs of their region. She added that

they also meet face-to-face with principals to plan future initiatives accordingly. She reported the lack of qualified candidates for open jobs as a pressing concern overall, as well as the need for more administrative support.

Josh Johnson also asked what major changes she anticipates in the next few years. Janet O'Hara highlighted the improved relationship with DPI due to intense TSI (Targeted Support and Improvement) work. She indicated plans to address the negative stigma associated with TSI/CSI work and stressed the need to recognize North Dakota's overall good educational performance compared to its national counterparts.

Chair Meehl asked about the RRVEC board member's positions and board meeting attendance. Janet O'Hara clarified that all 21 board members are superintendents, and they are appointed by their own school board. She reported about 80% attendance at meetings and added that their virtual option had increased attendance.

Chair Meehl also inquired about the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training program. Janet O'Hara discussed the implementation of the LETRS training in her region and explained the delayed rollout due to the high educator turnover rate, stating that they are focusing on onboarding new hires.

Chair Meehl asked about the impact of the therapy dog program on educational goals. Janet O'Hara explained how dogs are integrated into school routines. She highlighted examples where therapy dogs have positively influenced student's behavior by providing emotional support, encouraging reluctant readers, and enhancing student engagement. She noted that therapy dogs also provide support during traumatic events.

Superintendent Baesler commented on the great partnerships between REAs and DPI, and the great work RRVEC is doing.

Josh Johnson moved to accept the REA presentation of RRVEC. Lyndsi Engstrom seconded. No discussion.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>VOTE (Yes/ No)</b>
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Superintendent Kirsten Baesler	Yes
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Josh Johnson	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Absent – No Vote
Board Member Burdell Johnson	Absent – No Vote
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

Motion passed 5-0.

Superintendent Kirsten Baesler left the meeting at 2:06 pm.

**b. Roughrider Education Services Program (RESP) - Riley Mattson**

Riley Mattson began his presentation by explaining the plans to consolidate with Great Northwest Education Cooperative noting the combined REA will be called the Western Education Regional Cooperative (WERC) effective July 1, 2024. He noted that he and Ben Schaefer decided to report together to discuss the details of their merger.

Riley Mattson reported for RESP, and discussed their mission and goals, and reviewed each staff member's duties. He also discussed RESP's governance board structure which consists of five sections, each with two designees. He mentioned that their board meeting attendance had been approximately 90% for the last three to four years, noting more consistency with a virtual option. He mentioned they also have a therapy dog who has done great work with English Learner (EL) students to ease apprehension and has produced great results. He briefly reviewed their fiscal reports, discussed their financial approval process and offered the link for a detailed breakdown. He reviewed their area map, and noted that they have a smaller number of students than other REAs but cover a large area of 14,300 miles. Riley Mattson reviewed all RESP members noting the 17 school districts, over 7,770 students, and 645 educators. He added that once they merge to become WERC, they will cover the entire western side of the state and will have 33 school districts. Riley discussed core areas of focus and reviewed a table of the RESP offerings by ND Century Code in the areas of professional development, technology support services, assistance with school improvement efforts, student data, and expansion and enrichment of curriculum. He noted their planetarium dome, which has been popular for students, and has been rented to various entities for events. Next, he outlined the organization's professional development opportunities and discussed their focus on developing culture within their schools to create a supportive environment to positively influence students and staff. He also highlighted their bus driver training program and noted that RESP has initiated paraprofessional training sessions in response to superintendent requests. He touched on the Pathways to Reading program's focus on the Science of Reading and the implementation of book studies that offer graduate credit. Riley acknowledged the challenges of funding and staffing, fiscal transition, and funding sustainability. He then listed RESP's successes of strong staff retention, successful grant applications, great collaborative efforts among schools and REAs and the upcoming merge with GNWEC. He expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming challenge of this merger and looks forward to his partnership with Ben Schaefer.

**c. Great Northwest Education Cooperative (GNWEC) - Ben Schaefer**

Ben Schaefer presented for the GNWEC. He noted that he is also 50% director of the Bakken Area Skills Center and discussed the center's progress and overall expansion efforts. Ben Schaefer touched on the merger plans with RESP, highlighting the meticulous review processes with Riley Mattson to ensure a smooth transition. He referred to links with additional documents in the work center hub that has detailed merger information, covering aspects such as employee handbooks and budgeting and benefits of the merger. He gave a brief overview of GNWEC, discussed shared services, and addressed the

assistance of their seven CSI/TSI schools. He introduced current staff members and concluded by outlining plans for administrative meet-and-greet sessions in July and staff meetings in September, emphasizing the importance of connectivity with the merging staff.

Josh Johnson inquired about the configuration of the new REA and skills center and asked about the efficiencies and opportunities that they will be able to provide. Ben Schafer highlighted the diverse programs now available to students at the Skills Center, such as building trades, welding, and a premier automation program. He also discussed the ongoing efforts to enhance collaboration between educational institutions and staff, and then streamline operations, including consolidating online classes.

Lyndsi Engstrom asked Ben Schaefer to speak to the vision of the merger. He explained that the rationale is to enhance services by pooling resources and expanding offerings to better serve schools. Riley Mattson added that the merger will facilitate growth and efficiency, enabling a more streamlined approach to service delivery. He expresses enthusiasm for the potential growth and impact of the merger, citing examples of a successful merger of Minot and Bismarck.

Chair Meehl asked about the governing board structure of superintendents and school board members and asked how the WERC governing board will be modeled. Riley Mattson discussed his positive experiences with this structure of a mix of members. Both Riley Mattson and Ben Schafer envision a board with equal representation from the North and South sections and bi-monthly meetings going forward.

Josh Johnson moved to accept the REA presentation of RESP. Eric Nelson seconded. No discussion.

NAME	VOTE (Yes/ No)
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Board Member Josh Johnson	Yes
Superintendent Kirsten Baesler	Absent – No Vote
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Absent – No Vote
Board Member Burdell Johnson	Absent – No Vote
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

Motion passed 4-0.

Eric Nelson moved to accept the REA presentation of GNWEC. Lyndsi Engstrom seconded. No discussion.

<b>NAME</b>	<b>VOTE (Yes/ No)</b>
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Board Member Josh Johnson	Yes
Superintendent Kirsten Baesler	Absent – No Vote
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Absent – No Vote
Board Member Burdell Johnson	Absent – No Vote
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes

Motion passed 4-0.

There being no other business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:51 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING:** The next meeting is scheduled for May 20, 2024, at 1:00 p.m.

Minutes taken and prepared by Shauna Marchus