

**STATE BOARD OF PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION
MINUTES OF MEETING
January 26, 2026**

State Board of Public School Education members met in 10th Floor NDDPI Conference Room at the State Capitol Building, Bismarck and via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, January 26, 2026

State Board Members in Attendance:

Chair Sonia Meehl
Vice Chair Mike McHugh
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom

State Board Members in Attendance Virtually:

Board Member Jason Rohr
Board Member Eric Nelson

State Board Members Absent:

Superintendent Levi Bachmeier
Board Member Morgan Forness

Others in Attendance:

Mark Openshaw (Assistant Attorney General), John Porter (South East Education Cooperative Executive Director), Justin Fryer (Lisbon School District Superintendent), Dr. Steven Johnson (Fort Ransom School District Superintendent)

Others in Attendance Virtually:, Shauna Marchus (NDDPI Admin), Melissa Hamilton (Attorney General Paralegal), Kathie Erickson (County Superintendent), Adam Tescher (NDDPI), Chelsey Jones

Chair Meehl called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. CST

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: November 26, 2025

Lyndsi Engstrom moved to approve the minutes from the November 26, 2025, meeting. Mike McHugh seconded the motion. No discussion. Motion carried unanimously.

2. REA Audit Presentation: South East Education Cooperative (SEEC)

Chair Meehl briefly reviewed the REA Audit Presentation guiding framework requirements for REA presentations.

John Porter presented an overview of SEEC, covering its mission, vision, values, staffing, board structure, strategic and operational plans, accreditation, finances, and program outcomes. SEEC serves 33 schools, representing about 40% of the state's students. He mentioned his transition to Executive Director occurred July 2024. He explained how their strategic plan focuses on targeted supports, relationship building, and sustainability, reinforced by annual planning and stakeholder engagement. SEEC remains accredited by Cognia through June 2027. Financially, he reported a clean audit, strong fund balance, and reinvestment into innovation grants. Key services he discussed included professional development, Medicaid billing support, early learning, school improvement, and fiscal management for the ND Public Health Insurance Trust. John Porter addressed questions from the board on finances, staffing, innovation grants, career and technical education, and

compensation reviews. He concluded with priorities to strengthen partnerships, secure sustainable funding and healthcare options, and address staffing shortages, especially in special education.

Mike McHugh moved to approve the SEEC’s audit presentation. Jason Rohr seconded the motion. No further discussion.

NAME	VOTE (Yes/ No)
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes
Board Member Jason Rohr	Yes
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes
Superintendent Levi Bachmeier	Absent
Board Member Morgan Forness	Absent

The motion passed 5-0.

3. Review the Record, Discuss and Take Action on the Reorganization of the Fort Ransom Public School District No.6 and Lisbon Public School District No.19

Chair Meehl explained that this Board’s role is to approve or deny the reorganization plan presented, but if approved by the Board, it would still have to go to the voters in both school districts to take effect.

Chair Meehl read through the reorganization plan packet.

Assistant Attorney General Mark Openshaw noted a few clarifications:

- There are 599 students at Lisbon and 11 students at Fort Ransom currently, for a total of 610 students.(sections B & C).
- Lisbon School District is currently contracted to replace their HVAC system in the Elizabeth Middle School. (Section E Planned Construction)
- Per student valuation:
 - Fort Ransom: \$4,427,632 divided by 11 students results in a per-student valuation of \$402,512.
 - Lisbon: \$23,000,000 divided by 599 students results in a per-student valuation of \$38,727.
 - Combined: \$27,000,000 divided by 610 students results in a per-student valuation of \$45,287.
- Bonded indebtedness for the Lisbon Public School District is \$2,550,308. He noted that Fort Ransom’s obligations will be resolved prior to July 1. Lisbon’s bond amount remains at \$2,550,308 at this time.
- Section P and Q: Century Code requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide a number. The Lisbon School District will be designated as “Lisbon Public School District,” and the assigned number will come from the Superintendent of Schools.
- There was unanimous approval at the county level, with a vote 4-0 by the reorganization committee.
- There was no testimony in opposition to the reorganization at the local hearings.

There was discussion held about the composition of the reorganization committee. Steven Johnson referred to what he called the “*reorganization planning committee*” which was made up of representatives from the two districts that created the plan, which was then acted upon by the county’s reorganization committee, which was appointed by the county commission and distinct from the “planning” committee.

Mike McHugh moved to approve the Fort Ransom / Lisbon Reorganization Plan based on the following key factors:

1. The Fort Ransom school is closed
2. There was unanimous approval at the local level
3. There was not any opposition at the local level
4. The plan meets all statutory requirements

Lyndsi Engstrom seconded the motion.

Discussion:

Board members praised the reorganization packet as well-prepared and well-presented, noting strong input from both school boards.

NAME	VOTE (Yes/ No)
Board Member Jason Rohr	Yes
Vice Chair Mike McHugh	Yes
Board Member Lyndsi Engstrom	Yes
Board Member Eric Nelson	Yes
Chair Sonia Meehl	Yes
Superintendent Levi Bachmeier	Absent
Board Member Morgan Forness	Absent

The motion passed 5-0.

Chair Meehl allowed guests from Fort Ransom and Lisbon to comment on the reorganization process. Steven Johnson explained that Fort Ransom chose reorganization due to declining enrollment. Justin Fryer reported positive community input and strong collaboration between both districts, noting benefits such as expanded services for students (music, counseling, special education, career/tech education, and dual credit opportunities). He emphasized that the plan strengthens relationships and provides Fort Ransom representation on the board. Discussion also was held regarding the choice of reorganization over dissolution.

4. Board Updates

It was noted that next month’s agenda was light. Members suggested to change the February’s meeting location so they can stay at the Hughes Building with the intent to hold the SBPSE meeting immediately after the CTE meeting. Arrangement will be made and further communicated to members.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Minutes taken and prepared by Shauna Marchus