MINUTES – Board Meeting
Thursday, March 12, 2026
Teams

The Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB) meeting was called to order at 8:00am by Board Chair Cory Steiner. Board members present by video conference were Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Cory Steiner, Dena Venneman, and Arlene Wolf from DPI. Siri Coleman joined the meeting at 8:06am and Sheila Schlafmann joined at 8:17am. Evan Kritzberger and Patti Stedman were absent.

Also present were ESPB Executive Director Becky Pitkin and Amy Bigelow from ESPB, Mark Openshaw from Office of Attorney General, Erin Jacobson and Marijke Leibel from ND RISE, Amy Flicek from NDUnited, Greg Harp, Alexandra Escobar, and Evan Chrise from Teachers of Tomorrow, and other online guests.

Introductions were held.

Motion to Include Additional Agenda Items – There are two applicant requests from Aaron Allard and Fortunato Nariz in the Director's Report that will be included with action items. Angela Nagel made a motion to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Dustin Hager. Board members who voted in favor were Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Motion to Ratify January and February Licensure Lists – Sarah Lerud made a motion to ratify the January and February licensure lists. Motion seconded by Jenny Bladow. Board members who voted yes were Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

<u>CASES</u>

Cox, Jacqueline – Ms. Cox's license relinquished her license in January 2023 after a settlement agreement was issued by the Board for Ms. Cox being in Violation of NDCC 15.1-13-25(1)(j) and Administrative Code 67.1-03-01-02(3). Ms. Cox disputed the allegations in the complaint and denied that any violations occurred. The signed settlement agreement stipulated that Ms. Cox could apply for renewal two years from the date of the settlement agreement, which she has now done.

Cory Steiner asked Assistant Attorney General Mark Openshaw to review the options available to the Board. Mark said the board could decide to grant or deny Ms. Cox's application for licensure, and if denied, would need robust discussion as to the reasons.

Jenny Bladow pointed out if there had been any other offenses or charges, there would be the requirement that Ms. Cox self-disclose. Becky clarified that the reason the license was suspended was not criminal offenses but instead were based on a Request for Inquiry. The law and administrative rule cited stated Ms. Cox was unable to manage conditions detrimental to learning or to students' physiological or psychological well-being.

Siri Coleman made a motion to deny the request for renewal from Jacqueline Cox based on the initial statutes cited in the 2023 settlement agreement. Motion seconded by Angela Nagel. Siri feels that when the Board reviewed and took action on the original

Request for Inquiry they felt there was cause to revoke her license based on statute cited. She understands Ms. Cox has applied for a substitute license, but it's important to consider all information carefully. Angela agreed with Siri and also noted that though Ms. Cox does not admit to these things happening she still doesn't believe it's ok and is not comfortable renewing her license. Cory Steiner agreed, and though the application is for a substitute license, feels that all licenses need to be valued the same as they allow individuals to be working with kids.

Jenny Bladow asked what the Board would want to see from Ms. Cox to reinstate her license, as the settlement agreement states she could reapply in two years. Siri said she feels that admission that the events occurred would be important. She believes that individuals have also completed an ethics course in the past. Becky added that often, demonstration of corrective action/remediation of past behaviors is shown. Cory Steiner agreed that it makes a difference, and he doesn't necessarily see any corrective action/steps that have been taken. He worried that without corrective action, the same outcome may occur.

Board members who voted yes to the motion were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Ennen, Crystal – Ms. Ennen's file is being reviewed due to a Request for Inquiry that was received from Fargo Public Schools due to potential breach of contract, in violation of NDCC 15.1-13-25(g). Before discussion began Cory Steiner disclosed that he has a conflict of interest, as this is from his district. He is choosing to recuse himself from this case and will turn off his camera and microphone until this case has been completed. Cory asked Jenny Bladow to lead this portion of the meeting.

When the breach occurred Ms. Ennen had a valid license. Her license has since expired. Mark Openshaw reviewed possible options including disciplinary action, dismissing the case, or tabling until Ms. Ennen applies for renewal. The downside of tabling is that Ms. Ennen could apply for licensure in another state and it wouldn't be in the NASDTEC Clearinghouse. Mark is hesitant to issue a settlement agreement, as Ms. Ennen may be resistant to signing if she doesn't have a valid license and it would end up leading to litigation. Jenny Bladow pointed out that Fargo Public Schools doesn't appear to have an option to cure the breach. Dustin Hager asked if the Board tables until she reapplies, if that would be tracked in the ESPB office? Yes, it would. Mark reminded the Board that when they make their motion and have their discussion, to include reasons/rationale for decision. Motion would be to take disciplinary action, dismiss, or table.

Angela Nagel made a motion to table the case until Ms. Ennen reapplies for licensure. She said there's one document that states Ms. Ennen's room was left in chaos, but another document that says she was checked out of her room and does not mention

outstanding items that needed to be done. Angela feels this can be addressed if Ms. Ennen ever attempts to renew. Motion seconded by Dustin Hager. He agrees with all Angela has said. Siri Coleman concurs with Angela – there was a list of items that would cure the breach and she was having a hard time finding information showing the breach wasn't cured. She feels if Ms. Ennen ever renews it can be addressed at that time. Board members who voted yes were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Opdahl, Angela – Ms. Opdahl's file was reviewed after a Request for Inquiry was received from a parent for alleged violations of various areas of ND Century Code and US Code of Federal Regulations. Becky added that the order the documents are provided to the Board are in the order they were received. Also, DPI Office of Specially Designed Instruction is aware of this case and is also looking into it. Attorney Mark Openshaw reminded the Board they need to concentrate on what is within ESPB's scope as they review this case.

Before discussion began Sheila Schlafmann disclosed that she does not know this particular teacher but does know the administrator associated with the case. She does not know this teacher but does know the administrator associated with the case. Cory Steiner made a motion to allow Sheila Schlafmann to participate in this case. Seconded by Angela Nagel. Board members who voted yes were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Siri Coleman asked for refresher of the code cited – Administrative Code 67.1-03-01-03(6) - shall present complete and accurate information on any document in connection with professional responsibilities, and 67.1-03-01-04(2) – may not distort or misrepresent facts concerning educational matter. Angela Nagel said that as a special education teacher she feels the interpretation of the complaint is that the IEP notice was not sent to the parent, who is not the current legal guardian.

Siri Coleman made a motion to dismiss the case against Ms. Opdahl based on the fact that it doesn't seem rights were violated, in reference to the citations presented to the board. Seconded by Sarah Lerud. Siri doesn't believe there is evidence to support the proposed violations. Sarah agreed and didn't think any rights were violated. She stated the link to the meeting was sent late, though it was still sent. Mistakes happen and this mistake doesn't necessitate disciplinary action against Ms. Opdahl's license. Cory Steiner feels that it's a district issue if they choose to take any action and it's out of the Board's purview. Angela Nagel agrees with the previous statements, and it doesn't seem this was normal procedure for IEP meetings for this specific learner. Board members who voted in favor of the motion were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Zerr, Trista – Ms. Zerr's file is being reviewed after a Request for Inquiry was received from a parent for alleged violations of various areas of ND Century Code and US Code of Federal Regulations. Many of the elements of this case are similar to the last case.

Sheila Schlafmann disclosed that she does not know Ms. Zerr. Jenny Bladow made motion to allow Sheila to participate in this case. Seconded by Siri Coleman. Board members who voted yes were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Angela Nagel made a motion to dismiss. Seconded by Sheila Schlafmann. Angela said this is very similar to discussion on the previous case. There has not been a violation that would necessitate disciplinary action against Ms. Zerr's license. Sheila agreed that there doesn't seem to be enough to take action. Board members who voted in favor of the motion were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

The regular meeting recessed at 8:56am.

Administrative Subcommittee – Called to order at 8:56am and reviewed by Administrative Subcommittee of the Education Standards and Practices Board. Administrative Subcommittee members present were Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. Patti Stedman was absent.

Bussman, D'Aulan – Ms. Bussman's file is being reviewed after a Request for Inquiry was received from a parent for alleged violations of various areas of ND Century Code and US Code of Federal Regulations. Before discussion began Sheila Schlafmann recused herself from this case. She knows Ms. Bussman very well. Sheila will turn off her camera and microphone until the case review has been completed This is related to two previous cases from today. Attorney Mark Openshaw did not have additional information to add.

Cory Steiner made a motion to dismiss the case against Ms. Bussman. Seconded by Dustin Hager. They both felt the same discussion from the cases for Ms. Zerr and Ms. Opdahl apply. Cory said there are organizations that deal with potential special education violations and district board policies in place to address these situations. Administrative Subcommittee members who voted in favor were Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Dustin asked if the person who files the Request for Inquiry receives notification of the outcome of the case. Yes, they do. They may also receive a copy of the meeting minutes if requested.

Administrative Subcommittee adjourned at 8:59am and the regular meeting resumed.

January Minutes and Special Meeting Minutes, January and February License and Financial Reports – Jenny Bladow made a motion to approve the January meeting minutes, special meeting minutes, and January and February license and financial reports. Motion seconded by Angela Nagel. Board members who voted in favor were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

The January 2026 financial report showed $99,751.24 in total income received, $117,263.65 in total expenses, with a net income of minus $17,612.41. The January 2026 license/financial items totaled 1183. This number includes background checks, endorsements, late fees, licensing fees, and application fees.

The February 2026 financial report showed $87,790.04 in total income received, $78,818.29 in total expenses, with a net income of $8,971.75 The February 2026 license/financial items totaled 799. This number includes background checks, endorsements, late fees, licensing fees, and application fees.

Becky pointed out the license refund line item in the budget. Lacey Hinsz in the ESPB office has been working to clean up accounts and issue refunds of unused licensure fees. Also, PAAC program review content experts have been paid out.

Applicant Requests –

- **Aaron Allard –** Mr. Allard has requested a waiver of the amount of experience a driver education mentor teacher needs to have. Because Mr. Allard is licensed to teach elementary education, Administrative Rule 67.1-02-03-06(7)(p) states that he must complete field experience hours with a driver's education mentor with at least three years of experience in driver's education. The individual Mr. Allard has proposed to work with has almost 2 years of experience. Cory Steiner made a motion to deny the request from Mr. Allard. Motion seconded by Siri Coleman. Siri said administrative rules carry the same weight as law and there isn't an option to waive. Cory agrees and cannot support going against rule. Becky said ESPB works very closely with the driver education group and there's been no recommendation to change any requirements. Board members who voted in favor of the motion were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.
- **Fortunato Nariz –** Mr. Nariz has requested a waiver of the Praxis II testing. The Board reviewed Mr. Nariz's licensure history and test attempts. Siri Coleman made a motion to deny the request. Motion seconded by Dustin Hager. Siri said there are routes an applicant has if they've attempted tests multiple times without passing and she doesn't see sufficient attempts to pursue that route. Dustin

concurred. Board members who voted in favor of the motion were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Board Meeting Dates – Meeting dates for 2026-2027 have been provided to the Board. All dates are the second Thursday of each month, as has been done in the past. Angela Nagel made a motion to approve the 2026-2027 meeting dates as written. Motion seconded by Sarah Lerud. All voted in favor, none opposed. Motion carried.

Shortage Areas – In January 2026, DPI data was presented on shortage areas. In the past, all areas were designated as critical shortage, apart from a few years where physical education was not. This designation is used for both alternate access licenses and for TFFR return to teaching for retired members. Dustin Hager made a motion to name all areas shortage for the 2026-2027 school year. Seconded by Siri Coleman. Board members who voted yes were Jenny Bladow, Siri Coleman, Dustin Hager, Sarah Lerud, Angela Nagel, Sheila Schlafmann, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Teachers of Tomorrow – Greg Harp, Evan Chrise, and Alexandra Escobar from Teachers of Tomorrow joined the meeting to give the board an overview of their alternative licensure program. They are hoping to become an approved program under NDCC 15.1-13-10 that allows for alternative licensure programs to operate in North Dakota if certain requirements are met. Teachers of Tomorrow does meet these criteria as outlined in current statute. They are the largest alternative program in the country and have been operating for nearly 20 years in 10 states, with another just approved last month. They have a 76% teacher retention rate after three years in TX.

Teachers of Tomorrow offers an Essential Pathway and an Advanced Pathway to licensure. Each includes coursework hours, instructional projects, and Subject Matter Competency requirements that include a pedagogical exam and a content area exam. The program focuses on expanding access to licensed teachers in high-need areas with support for career changers. They also work to emphasize public marketing to let individuals know about the program.

Jenny Bladow asked if the Board is planning to discuss and develop a list of questions. The Board will be meeting in April face-to-face and Becky is hoping to discuss more at that time. Jenny asked about the “Field Observation Support” and wondered what that looks like. This is completed while the candidate is serving as a teacher of record. Videos are sent to their observer, and feedback is provided regarding support. Becky reminded Jenny that American Board includes clinical practice which is in statute. Teacher of Tomorrow is an AAQEP accredited program. Cory Steiner thanked the group for presenting and asked Board members to come with a list of questions for the April meeting.

ND RISE – Erin Jacobson and Marijke Leibel from NDRISE continue to work with beginning teachers and mentors. For the 2025-2026 school year they've worked with nearly 700 teachers and 190 new mentors, with numbers increasing as the year progresses.

Erin thanked Lacey in the ESPB office for her work in processing stipends. The process has been refined over the years and Erin appreciates the work Lacey has done with this process. NDRISE continues to partner with districts and organizations to support mentoring and educator support systems across the state. The Spring Coaches Academy will be held April 8-9.

Director's Report – Superintendent Bachmeier has approached ESPB about taking over a number of credentials. Many questions have been generated in the office report of this will be sent to DPI. Taking over credentials would require a law change and an appropriation bill to support the increased workload.

Next month the board will look at the makeup of the Administrative Subcommittee. Siri pointed out that a non-public teacher has not been a member of this subcommittee previously. Work continues to address reading legislation. Looking forward to next session. ESPB's Administrative rules were updated after last legislative session to include grooming. Wisconsin has now passed a bill to update their law to criminalize grooming. Becky asked administrators Sheila Schlafmann and Cory Steiner to think about if school boards develop policy about how any district employee (subs, paras, ect) communicate with students, as good policy promotes positive behaviors. How are district employees allowed to communicate with students?

Becky has also provided the Board information on ETS Pro-Ethica and has asked Lisa Colon Durham to present to the Board on this. Site visits are ongoing, with EPPs all at different stages in the process. Special education has been meeting with CEDAR group to examine special education licensure in North Dakota. Right now, ND is a categorical state and they are looking to move toward all special education licenses being strategists.

As the Board continues to examine shortage area data, Becky wants to look at apprentice data specifically. She believes the numbers for retention of apprentices will be positive and perhaps that will help with additional funding going forward.

Variance Pilot – In the Board materials there is a document for the Core Variance. Board has allowed ND EPPs to have variance based on a menu of options to demonstrate competencies in reading, writing, and math. In an effort to be equitable to out-of-state applicants, the office is looking to do a pilot for those individuals. A draft of options has been provided to the Board. No action is needed today, and this will be reviewed further in April.

Board Member Reports
NDACTE – NDACTE is running their current Core Variance pilot that will soon be ending. They've collected more data, with more individuals admitted to programs using menu of options. Additional information will be shared in April. NDACTE has also talked about individuals substitute teaching during their student teaching semester, with some guidance having been sent to EPPs. Administrative Rule requires 10 weeks of full-time student teaching.
Association of Non-Public Schools – Preparing for upcoming session.
Association of School Administrators – Infinite Campus continues to be front and center for all school districts. They've encountered a few glitches, but are developing a plan for how to transition systems. Administrators continue to watch the school lunch initiative to see if it becomes a ballot measure. If that happens, administrators are working to be clear this is not something initiated by K-12 districts. Cory Steiner is serving on a task force to look at online learning.
School Boards Association – Not present.
NDUnited – No update.
DPI – Not present.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:21am.

Chair Cory J. Steiner

Rebecca S. Pitkin
Secretary/Executive Director