MINUTES – Board Meeting
Thursday, October 8, 2026
Microsoft Teams

The Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB) meeting was called to order at 8:00am by Board Chair Cory Steiner. Board members present were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. Arlene Wolf joined at 8:26am. Evan Kritzberger and Angela Nagel were absent.

Also present were ESPB Executive Director Becky Pitkin, Mari Riehl, Lacey Hinsz, and Amy Bigelow from ESPB, Mark Openshaw from Office of Attorney General, Erin Jacobson and Marijke Leibel from ND RISE, Amy Flicek and Amber Haskell from ND United, Michelle Griffin from UND, Jace Peterson from Starkweather School Board, Raquel Fischer from University of Mary, and other online guests.

Introductions were held.

Motion to Include Additional Agenda Items – Items to add to the agenda include an action item regarding the FBI/BCI background check fee. Board Chair Cory Steiner asked for a motion to include additional agenda items and to ratify the September licensure list. Jenny Bladow made a motion to approve the agenda as amended and to ratify the September license list. Seconded by Dustin Hager. Board members who voted yes were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

CASES

Briones, Elaine – Ms. Briones's file was reviewed after a Request for Inquiry was received from a parent due to alleged violation of Administrative Code 67.1-03-02 Principle I. Becky has received information from the district that they have completed an investigation. Patti Stedman made a motion to dismiss the case. Seconded by Katelyn Benning. Patti thanked the parent for providing such thorough information with their Request for Inquiry. She believes cases like this need to be handled at the school level and not by our Board. Katelyn agreed. Cory Steiner also agreed and is happy the district did their investigation and it was resolved. He wishes all RFIs provided such in-depth information. Board members who voted in favor of the motion were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Defender, Vanessa – Ms. Defender's file was reviewed due to finding offenses in NDCourts that she did not disclose on her application for licensure. She provided a response after asked. Assistant Attorney General Mark Openshaw added that Ms. Defender has satisfied all court requirements, so there are no outstanding fees. Patti Stedman made a motion to grant the license and to require that Ms. Defender self-report any future offenses. Motion seconded by Jenny Bladow. Patti appreciated Ms. Defender's response, and it sounds like she's taking positive steps to move forward. Jenny agreed. Board members who voted yes were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Lund, Jeremy – Attorney Mark will provide the Board with information. Mr. Lund was charged with an offense that if found guilty would require his license to be automatically revoked under NDCC 15.1-13-26. In July 2026 the Board passed a motion to offer Mr. Lund a settlement agreement to suspend his license until the resolution of his criminal case. Before that settlement agreement was signed and returned to the Board, Mr. Lund entered a pre-trial diversion with stipulations in place that need to be met. A pre-trial diversion is not the same as a guilty plea, so automatic revocation under NDCC 15.1-13-26 is no longer required. Mark explained that to proceed with this case there will need to be two motions – the first to reopen the case for Mr. Lund, and the next motion would need to include any action the Board desires to take.

Dustin Hager made a motion to revisit the case for Mr. Lund. Seconded by Dena Venneman. Board members who voted yes were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Cory Steiner asked Mark to review options the Board has available to them. Mr. Lund's charges were under NDCC 12.1-17-01.2(2)(c). The Board may choose to issue a new settlement agreement with updated stipulations. Since the first settlement agreement was not returned, Mr. Lund's license is still active. Patti Stedman asked if the facts of the case should be reviewed again, since Mr. Lund was not given the opportunity to provide a response the first time because it feel under statute for automatic revocation at the time. Mark said a Request for Inquiry can be requested with a response from Mr. Lund. Mark has been in communication with Mr. Lund's attorney and because the situation changed with a pre-trial diversion, that's why a signed settlement agreement was not received.

Cory does not want to make a decision without both sides represented. Patti said she feels conflicted.

Cory Steiner made a motion to table the case until November and to request a letter of explanation/additional information from Mr. Lund. Seconded by Patti Stedman Cory wants to be sure the Board has all information needed to make an informed decision. Board members who voted in favor were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Pavlish, Landon – A settlement agreement was issued in July 2026 stating Mr. Pavlish's license would remain suspended until the criminal charges against him had been resolved. Information has been received showing the resolution of his criminal case.
New information regarding the court case has been received. Cory Steiner asked attorney Mark Openshaw to provide an update. Before discussion began, Dena Venneman said she participated in the case for Mr. Pavlish in July when it was last

discussed, but she's come to learn more information and is recusing herself going forward.

Mark reviewed the history of the case. A settlement agreement was issued in June 2025 and all requirements were met. One condition of that settlement agreement was that if criminal charges were brought forward, the Board could review again. Mr. Pavlish plead guilty to Disorderly Conduct – Offensive Condition in violation of NDCC 12.1-31-01(1)(g). The case has concluded proceedings in court, so now sits in front of the Board to discipline further or take whatever steps they feel are necessary.

Patti Stedman asked if pleading guilty to a Misdemeanor B excludes him from teaching. Mark said no, it doesn't, as the charges don't fall under automatic revocation statute. Dustin Hager asked Mark about the settlement agreement that was sent and asked what is considered resolution of the case. Is this the end of court proceedings, or satisfaction of all requirements including probation? Mark said the guilty plea is considered the resolution of the case and if Mr. Pavlish would violate his probation that would be a new case to review. Cory Steiner pointed out there is a current letter from Mr. Pavlish provided in Board materials for review.

Patti Stedman said Mr. Pavlish has done all things the Board asked of him. This case is challenging for her, as she does not want the actions to happen again, but also believes he's taken steps to correct the behavior. Mr. Pavlish has shared that he's been offered a contract for this year and the district is holding the position. Patti asked if the Board were to grant a license, if a stipulation can be included that the district is required to report if anything happens. Cory said with a past case, the district where the individual was employed was required to provide quarterly updates on how the individual was doing. After the time period of that was satisfied, then the license was issued with no stipulations. Patti wondered how long the Board would do this for, if a license is issued.

Patti Stedman made a motion to reinstate the license for Mr. Pavlish with a requirement of quarterly progress reports through the end of the 27-28 school year from Mr. Pavlish and letters of support from his district. Patti stated if this is grooming, that needs to be taken very seriously. Dustin Hager seconded the motion. Patti appreciated that in the past Mr. Pavlish has been very responsive to the Board and to completing requirements set forth. The Board believes in second chances and she feels Mr. Pavlish has taken the opportunities to improve himself. Cory Steiner stated this case has been a more challenging one in his tenure on the Board. Board members who voted yes to the motion were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, and Patti Stedman. Cory Steiner voted no. Motion carried.

ND RISE – Enrollment for first and second year teachers continues with 672 mentor/beginning teacher pairs currently enrolled statewide. ND RISE has awarded 9 Beginning Teacher Network grants for the 2026-2027 school year. The continue to work on using retention data to better understand the long-term impact of ND RISE. Coaches

Academy began September 28th with 43 instructional coaches from across North Dakota. Additional Coaches Academy learning will be held throughout the school year.

Director's Report – ESPB will again be partnering with Shiloh Christian School for the 2nd year on a food drive to help stock the Free Little Pantry outside the office. Donations received last year helped to keep the pantry stocked for the better part of the past year.

Becky would like the Board to look at the Request for Inquiry form and for permission to expand the section that asks the petitioner to document what they've done at the local level to resolve the situation.

Becky provided an overview of the Novice Educator Standards that are being worked on by a national team. Becky presented on the competencies at the CAEP conference in September. A copy of that presentation has been provided to the Board. Jenny Bladow is curious about the Novice Educator Standards. She is excited to hear that this could be developed for teachers and is optimistic these can be implemented sooner rather than later.

Licensure – Cory Steiner has asked if the Board can look at grade configuration for elementary education to include K (K-8 instead of 1-8). This was reviewed in 2024 with input from stakeholders. Jennifer Jung shared that she was previously a kindergarten teacher, and now as a principal, how difficult it is to find qualified kindergarten teachers including Title teachers who teach kindergarten students. If the Board wants to revisit this, Becky can arrange for early childhood stakeholders to provide information to the Board. Jennifer said now that Science of Reading is required for all staff members, they are all learning about foundational literacy and learning those skills. Jenny Bladow said they have this same discussion frequently at UND and pointed out that when completers go to Minnesota, they automatically obtain a K-6 license. Cory asked Becky to gather information for November's meeting, so the Board has information to determine if they'd like to amend administrative rules to include kindergarten as part of the elementary education license.

FBI/BCI Background Check Fee – Amy Bigelow and Lacey Hinsz presented a history of the background check fees to the Board, asking for a fee increase from $44.50 to $50. The background check fee collected by ESPB has not changed since summer 2012 despite increased operating costs, staff time to review and process materials, and increased FBI fees. Jenny Bladow said this fee increase seems very conservative and wonders if it's enough. Amy said yes, in preparing materials for the meeting, staff was purposely conservative with this increase. Sarah Lerud made a motion to increase the ESPB background check fee for the FBI/BCI background check to $50. Seconded by Jenny Bladow. Board members who voted yes were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Amy will work to update the background check forms and instructions and will reach out to educator preparation program contacts to make them aware of the update. Jenny will also share this information at her next NDACTE meeting.

Applicant Request – A retired teacher has sent a letter to the office asking the Board to consider making substitute licenses permanent for retired teachers. The Board will look at this and visit in the future.

Ethics – New Resources from NASDTEC – The week after next is the NASDTEC Professional Practices Conference. Topic of this conference will be negotiating the grey. Most states believe in restorative action. Attorney Mark Openshaw will be moderating a panel that Becky will be doing with individuals from New Hampshire and Wyoming on how small offices manage.

Licensure Bands – This was in regard to discussion to possibly update the elementary education license to include kindergarten.

September Meeting Minutes and Financial Report – Dustin Hager made a motion to approve the September meeting minutes and financial reports. Motion seconded by Jennifer Jung. Following a voice vote, the chair declared the motion carried.

The September 2026 financial report showed $94,888.29 in total income received, $95,662.62 in total expenses, with a net income of minus $774.33. The September 2026 license/financial items totaled 1161. This number includes background checks, endorsements, late fees, licensing fees, and application fees.

Request for Inquiry Form – Becky has asked for permission to expand the Request for Inquiry form to include a section that asks the petitioner to document what they've done at the local level to resolve the situation. Patti Stedman made a motion to approve. Seconded by Sarah Lerud. Board members who voted yes were Katelyn Benning, Jenny Bladow, Dustin Hager, Jennifer Jung, Sarah Lerud, Patti Stedman, Cory Steiner, and Dena Venneman. None opposed. Motion carried.

Board Member Reports
NDACTE – At her last NDACTE meeting, Jenny Bladow emphasized the importance of addressing any concerns about background offenses early in the teacher education program so individuals can understand whether such issues may affect their ability to obtain licensure before they progress too far in their program. She also shared with the Interim Higher Education Institutions Committee about the partnership NDACTE and ESPB have for Core Variance and methods to demonstrate competencies. This was part of a legislative study.
Association of Non-Public Schools – Nothing new to report.
Association of School Administrators – Cory Steiner shared that at his meeting with other superintendents statewide healthcare was a topic and having teachers participate

in a statewide plan. They are very interested in the retention bonus bill that will be going through session and what that will look like. Additional discussion on funding as it relates to special education and EL. Getting prepped for upcoming legislative session.
School Boards Association – School Board convention will be held this weekend in Bismarck. Topics to be discussed include what ESPB is doing to help bring more teachers into classrooms. Lots of discussions about J1 teachers and how that is working for districts.
NDUnited – Board meeting will be held in a few weeks in Bismarck. Sarah Lerud's local district is organizing a round-table discussion with legislators to highlight what is going well and where they need support. They are very excited about this opportunity.
DPI – Arlene Wolf has been having similar conversations that Cory covered in his report. Next week DPI will be having ESSA implementation meeting and to discuss updates which include modernizing language and updating accountability measures/creating alternative accountability pathways. Clearing up language to help teachers, students, and parents.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:35am.

Chair

Secretary/Executive Director