

NORTHEAST REGIONAL MEETING Focuses on Special Education Challenges

**NORTHEAST
REGIONAL
MEETING**

By Marci Narum, NDSBA Communications & Marketing Manager

What does it take, financially and operationally, for a North Dakota public school district to safely educate a student with significant behavioral challenges?

That question drove much of the discussion during the NDSBA Northeast Regional Meeting on Sept. 10 in Devils Lake, where school board members, superintendents, special education leaders, and legislators shared concerns about increasing behavioral needs and staff safety; educator recruitment and retention; and the growing cost of providing appropriate services for students. About 30 people attended the Northeast Regional Meeting.

Devils Lake Public Schools Superintendent Ned Clooten said the challenges facing teachers today are like nothing he has seen in his 26 years in education. "Within our district of 1,800 students, we probably know about 10 students that would



NDSBA Board Member,
Lynn Carlson, Finley-Sharon



Carrington Schools Supt.,
Janelle Helm



Devils Lake Schools Supt.,
Ned Clooten

average at least one violent episode a month."

Clooten said the issue is leading to burnout and turnover, especially among special education staff. "I have a revolving door of special ed teachers because of the injuries caused by students," he said.

Other superintendents shared the same concerns and emphasized that providing the support these students need often requires significant staffing and financial resources. Finley-Sharon School Board Member and NDSBA Northeast Regional Director Lynn Carlson noted the difficulty of funding one-on-one support positions while balancing already strained district budgets.

The discussion also shed light on the broader effect behavioral challenges can have on classrooms and school operations. Carrington Schools Superintendent Janelle Helm said schools must consider the impact on all students while ensuring those with significant needs receive appropriate support.

"We always want to get students back to the classroom, but there are other kids in that room that are scared," Helm said. "They have to be ready to go back, and we have to be able to de-escalate and provide trauma services when necessary."

A recurring topic was the need for additional Level D placement options

Continued on page 2...



NORTHEAST REGIONAL MEETING

...Continued from page 1

in North Dakota for students whose behavioral needs exceed what local districts can safely provide. Clooten suggested the state consider a plan to establish regional Level D facilities in the state to improve outcomes for students while easing pressures on districts and staff. He pointed to the success of the Fargo School District, which built its own Level D facility.

"The data they have is just phenomenal," Clooten shared. "They've had young kids go to this specialized learning environment

and eventually transition back to their regular schools. We're just surviving. A regional Level D facility would solve so many issues within our special education departments."

State Representative Jayme Davis of Rolette said families in her constituency are forced to seek services outside North Dakota because suitable options are not available closer to home.

Helm stressed that addressing special education challenges will require collaboration among school districts, lawmakers, and communities. "People don't want to go to work to get hit, kicked, or bitten," Helm said. "We have to all work together and help people understand what schools are facing every day."



State Rep. Jayme Davis,
District 9, Rolette



NDSBA Board President
Nathan Berseth, Richland #44

Richland 44 School Board President and NDSBA Board President Nathan Berseth stressed the importance of inviting state legislators to visit the public schools in their districts. "Some of them haven't been in the school system for 30 or 40 years," Berseth said. "Their grandkids aren't in school anymore, so they don't understand. I don't think they can comprehend the issues we're talking about. We need to encourage our legislators to come into our schools."



**NORTHWEST
REGIONAL
MEETING**

The **NORTHWEST REGIONAL MEETING** will be held virtually in early- to mid-November, with the date and time to be determined. Watch for details in future communications from our office.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE ON THE BALLOT THIS NOVEMBER

By Erin Oban, North Dakotans for Public Schools



2026 ND Legislative Elections: ND4PS Public Education Voter Guide

North Dakota's public schools - our students, their families, and the educators who come through their doors each day - are directly impacted by those who show up to vote in elections and the individuals we elect at the ballot box.

No matter what party or candidate you choose, North Dakotans for Public Schools encourages you to ask questions, be informed, and vote for individuals who will use their power and influence to stand up for public schools and champion public education in their votes, words, and actions!



As school board members and administration, you fully understand the consequences of elections and the importance of informed decision-making. Once you put your names on the ballot and are elected to your roles, you're asked to seek information, weigh competing priorities, and make thoughtful decisions that represent your community and lead our public schools. You do your best with what you have, and that job can be made much easier (or much harder) depending on the support and partnership you get at the state and federal levels.

October is a good time to seek information, weigh your options, and

2026 NDSBA ANNUAL CONVENTION NEXT WEEK!

OCT. 8-9 AT BISMARCK EVENT CENTER



REGISTER NOW

Register for the 2026 NDSBA Annual Convention at www.ndsba.org. Log into your account under My Membership/Events/Register. The district business manager or another designated individual should complete registration for all district attendees. No refunds after Friday, Oct. 2.

CONVENTION SCHEDULE & MENUS

The schedules for the annual convention, School Law Seminar, and New Member Learning to Lead Workshop, along with the breakfast and lunch menus, are available to preview at <https://ndsba.org/ndsba-events/annual-convention>.

STANDING RESOLUTIONS

The Governmental Affairs Committee recommends seven resolutions for re-adoption as written and recommends two new resolutions for adoption. NDSBA members who are registered as delegates for the convention will vote on these recommendations. Read the GAC Report on Standing Resolutions at <https://ndsba.org/ndsba-events/annual-convention>.

BUSINESS MANAGER GRADUATION

Students graduating from the North Dakota School Business Manager Certification Program and students receiving recertification will be honored at the annual convention on Thursday, Oct. 8, at 1:15 p.m. (Hall A).

make informed decisions about the upcoming general election. As you prepare to head to the polls on Nov. 3, we encourage you (and all North Dakota voters) to take time to reflect on your own interactions with legislators and legislative candidates. Who has sought out your perspective and experience as a school leader? Who has taken time to listen to your district's needs? Who understands the challenges facing your students, families, educators, and communities? Who has worked with you to find solutions? Who values public education and fights for what our public schools need to improve?

We hope you'll ask those questions as you consider which

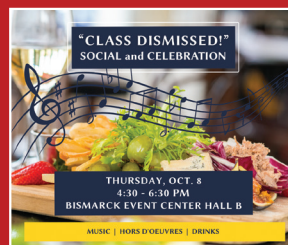
candidates will earn your vote in November. To help you and others be informed voters, our coalition has prepared a legislative voter guide – [available here](https://bit.ly/4A61Gx8) (<https://bit.ly/4A61Gx8>) or by visiting our [website](http://www.ndforpublicschools.com) (www.ndforpublicschools.com) – to know who's on the ballot and to help you evaluate candidates and their positions on public education.

School board members play a vital role in strengthening public schools, not only through the local decisions you make but also by being informed voters. We encourage you – and your family, friends, and neighbors, too – to make sure you're choosing legislators who will go to Bismarck to partner with you in that role.

"CLASS DISMISSED!"

SOCIAL & CELEBRATION

Please make plans to join us for the "Class Dismissed!" Social & Celebration immediately



following the opening session and keynote speaker on Thursday, Oct. 8. The event will feature live music from Mandan High School students – plus food, drinks, and prizes!

DOOR PRIZES

We're giving away some great prizes at the convention! Must be present to win!

- Pellet grill/smoker valued at more than \$500
- Epson – EF-30 Full Personal Lifestyle Projector valued at \$290
- \$100 Scheels gift card



THANK YOU TO OUR ANNUAL CONVENTION SPONSORS



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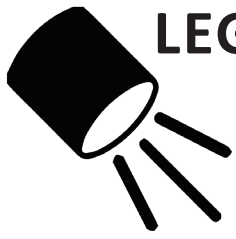
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LEGAL SPOTLIGHT

BALANCING ACCESS AND ORDER:

Understanding Updated Policy KAAA – Visitor Access and Communications in Schools

By KrisAnn Norby-Jahner, NDSBA General Counsel

Parents and community members often have a legitimate interest in visiting schools, attending board meetings, participating in school activities, and communicating with district personnel. At the same time, schools are places of learning and work where maintaining safety, privacy, and an orderly educational environment must remain a priority.

NDSBA template policy KAAA - Visitor Access and Communications in the Schools (recently updated in April 2026) provides schools with a framework for balancing these interests. The policy recognizes the importance of community engagement while establishing expectations and limitations for individuals who enter school property or communicate with school personnel.

VISITOR ACCESS IN SCHOOLS IS A PRIVILEGE

A “visitor” on school property is any individual who is on school property and is not acting in the capacity of a student, employee, or school board member. Visitors may include parents, contractors, vendors, service providers, and any other member of the public. State law requires public schools to be “free, open, and accessible at all times to any child” in accordance with N.D.C.C. 15.1-06-01, with limitations as allowed under state law that prohibits disruptions and interference with proper order and management in public schools. Parents most certainly have a right to access their children’s education records, and members of the

public have a right to attend open meetings.

However, “visitor” access to school property and communications with school personnel is a privilege granted by schools in the best interest of the educational environment and only as authorized under the law. The school board maintains custody and control of all school property under N.D.C.C. 15.1-09-33(2) and may delegate to the superintendent the oversight authority over school property and visitor access and appropriate communication procedures in accordance with the superintendent’s duties to supervise the general operations of the school under N.D.C.C. 15.1-14-01. Policy KAAA recommends delegating and allowing the superintendent to develop regulations and rules regarding visitor pre-authorization requirements, check-in procedures, expected communications, safeguards, limitations, and any other applicable restrictions in the best interest of the school district.

THE SUPERINTENDENT’S ROLE & VISITOR EXPECTATIONS

A policy cannot anticipate every circumstance. Day-to-day visitor management requires administrative procedures that can respond to the particular circumstances of a school building or district and its unique needs. Administrative regulations may further address visitor sign-in procedures, identification requirements, designated meeting locations, classroom visits,

communication expectations, and circumstances in which access may be limited.

However, in supporting a superintendent’s authorization to set reasonable expectations and boundaries, recent updates to template policy KAAA focus on the following visitor expectations:

- **Lawful Purpose.** Visitors entering school property must have a lawful purpose and must abide by the law when accessing and communicating with schools. No visitor should enter school property in violation of a court order, and no person should act in a manner in violation of N.D.C.C. 15.1-06-16 (prohibiting any person from (1) willfully disturbing a public school in session; (2) willfully interfering with or interrupting the proper order or management of a public school by an act of violence, boisterous conduct, or threatening language; or (3) rebuking, insulting, or threatening a teacher in the presence of a student).
- **Abide by Policies.** Visitors must abide by school policies, including but not limited to, drug, alcohol, and tobacco use; weapons prohibition; sexual offenders; patron and personnel complaints; violent and threatening behavior; and other policies designed to maintain order and acceptable standards of conduct on school property.

- **No Disruption or Interference.**

Visitors are prohibited from engaging in disruptive conduct that is interfering or interrupting the orderly operation/management of the school, or that is insulting, harassing, or threatening toward school personnel or students. Visitors who engage in such conduct (verbally and/or in writing) may immediately be asked to leave school property, have communications monitored appropriately, and may be subject to safeguards, limitations, or restrictions on future visitor access to school property and communications with district personnel and students.

- **Limitations on Solicitation.**

Solicitors are not permitted on school property except when authorized in accordance with state law and/or applicable school policy.

- **Limitations on Recording.**

Visitors are not allowed to videotape or electronically record district students and staff, including parent-teacher meetings, parent-administrator meetings, and any meetings related to education records and students, unless there is an authorized exception under the law (e.g., special education meetings in which recordings are necessary for parents to have meaningful access and communication as required under federal law). Administration can make exceptions to this policy within their discretion (e.g., extracurricular activities and performances, members of the press, etc.).

- **Classroom Visits.** Administration must approve any outside

visitors entering classrooms or participating in education-related activities. Visitors must abide by any applicable policies and regulations, including those that protect student education records and privacy under FERPA.

- **Sexual Offenders Denied.** Sexual offenders as defined under N.D.C.C. 12.1-20-25 are denied visitor access to school property unless authorized under the law or district policy. Visitors seeking access to school property who do not meet the legal definition of “sexual offender” but have pled guilty or been found guilty of a misdemeanor offense under N.D.C.C. 12.1-20 (Sex Offenses) may be restricted, limited, or denied access to school property when the health and/or safety of students and/or staff may be at risk as determined by the superintendent.

RESPONDING TO POLICY VIOLATIONS

Template policy KAAA establishes a graduated approach to violations. An individual who violates the policy or applicable administrative regulations may be notified of the violation and may be directed to leave school property. The individual may also be directed to follow administrative requirements concerning future communications and meetings.

For individuals who repeatedly violate district policies or regulations or willfully disrupt school operations, the superintendent, principal, or designee may establish specific perimeters governing school property access and communications. If an individual refuses to leave school property after being directed to do so, school administration may seek assistance from law enforcement.

Importantly, the policy reserves the superintendent’s authority to limit or restrict an individual’s access to school property and ability to communicate directly with school personnel when the visitor’s conduct violates the policy.

COMMUNICATION RESTRICTIONS SHOULD BE STRUCTURED

A notable change to policy KAAA is language that addresses not only physical access to school property but also communications with school personnel and students. When a visitor repeatedly engages in inappropriate communications, administrators may establish parameters for future communications and meetings. In practice, this may mean requiring communications to occur through designated administrators, limiting in-person meetings, requiring appointments, or establishing other reasonable procedures consistent with the policy and applicable law.

The goal should not be to eliminate legitimate communication. Rather, restrictions should be designed to prevent disruptive or inappropriate conduct while maintaining a workable avenue for the individual to communicate with the school when appropriate.

CONCLUSION

Policy KAAA provides school districts with a useful framework for maintaining a balance between access and order. Schools should remain welcoming places where parents and community members can participate in the educational process, but that access should exist within safe and reasonable boundaries.

Disclaimer: This article provides general information and is not legal advice. Schools should consult legal counsel regarding specific situations.

Prepare for Superintendent Evaluations: NDSBA Evaluator Service

This is a friendly reminder to begin preparing for your superintendent evaluation process. North Dakota Law requires school boards to complete a formative evaluation of superintendents on or before Nov. 15 (NDCC § 15.1-14-03). This evaluation must take place at an open public meeting.

The law regarding superintendent evaluations states that if the superintendent is found to be unsatisfactory in any area, the board shall detail its findings in the report and make recommendations. This process allows an opportunity for professional growth before the superintendent's formal evaluation, which must be complete on or before March 15.

To support your board in this important responsibility, NDSBA is offering a new Evaluator Service designed to make the superintendent evaluation process more efficient, organized, and effective by providing a secure platform for collecting and compiling board evaluations. Sign up today to get started!

Cost: \$350 initial enrollment fee, plus an annual fee of \$85 per board member, billed each year in August.

A complete list of your board members and their email addresses is required at

NDSBA EVALUATOR SERVICE



enrollment. Your school district's business manager (or other main contact) should complete the enrollment form.

If your board has not yet scheduled its superintendent evaluation or would like to learn more about the NDSBA Evaluator Service, we encourage you to contact us soon. We would be happy to discuss how the service can support your board's evaluation process this fall. Contact NDSBA Executive Director Amy De Kok at Amy.DeKok@ndsba.org.

Visit <https://www.youtube.com/live/GkjKeryBWq8> to watch the recording of our June Brunch & Learn, in which Amy gives an overview and demonstration of the platform.



STUDENTSFIRST GOVERNANCE LAUNCH INSTITUTES Underway Across North Dakota

NDSBA has kicked off its Launch Institutes, holding events in Bismarck, Dickinson, and Minot. The Launch Institute is the first step in a school district's journey through the StudentsFirst Governance Program, a board governance certification initiative focused on improving student outcomes through effective leadership and governance practices.

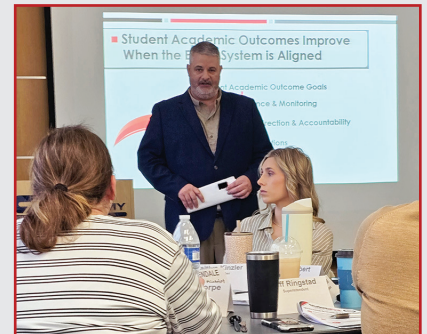
StudentsFirst provides school boards and district leadership teams with tools, strategies, and structured learning opportunities to strengthen governance systems, clarify roles and responsibilities, and align district efforts around student success.

"We get new board members every year, and it's hard for them to understand what board members' roles are versus what administrative roles are," shared Glen Ullin School Board President Jill Feser, who attended the Launch Institute in Bismarck last month. "And so, for us, it's important to keep learning and teaching, and again – keeping the students first."

The participating districts engaged in collaborative discussions, guided training, and action planning designed to support continuous improvement and long-term achievement.

"I guess the biggest takeaway is the student academic outcome goals and the roles that we play as the board members, and the importance of the communication between all of us to serve our community and our students," said Killdeer Board Member Tara Bohmbach.

Districts interested in future Launch Institute opportunities or learning more about the StudentsFirst Governance Program can contact Amy De Kok at Amy.DeKok@ndsba.org.



StudentsFirst Lead Coach Martin Bratrud facilitates the Launch Institute in Bismarck.



NDSBA Holiday Card Artwork Contest: November 17 Deadline

NDSBA is seeking original student artwork with a holiday theme to be featured on its annual holiday cards. Submissions should be created in a landscape format measuring 5.5" wide x 4.75" high.

The artist whose work is selected will be recognized in the December issue of the Bulletin and receive a \$50 Amazon gift card. NDSBA will also make a \$200 donation to the winner's classroom.



2025 Second Place Winner: Elly Tombarge, Grade 10 – Valley City

All submissions must include (please print!):

- Student's name • Student's Grade
- School district • Teacher's name

Artwork must be received in the NDSBA office **no later than 5 p.m. on Tuesday, November 17, 2026, to be considered.**

Mail to: NDSBA • 1224 West Owens Ave. • Bismarck, ND 58501

Or email: a high-quality scan (300 dpi or greater) to Marci.Narum@ndsba.org.

BUSINESS MANAGER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The North Dakota School Business Manager Certification Program (NDSBMCP) has scheduled these late fall and early winter training courses:

NOV. 6

Bismarck Public Schools Career Academy, 1221 College Dr.
(on the BSC campus)

Courses offered:

- Human Resources I
- Open Records & Meetings
- Ancillary Services
- Asset Management, Investing, & Bonding

DECEMBER (online)

Courses offered:

- Introduction to Payroll
- Introduction to Accounting

To apply, complete the Program Application Form, available on the NDSBA website under: Services → Business Manager Certification Program → Handbooks and Forms.

For additional information, contact Patty VerDouw at 800-932-8791 or Patty.VerDouw@ndsba.org.



2026 NDSBA COMMITTEES

Thank you to these board members for volunteering to serve on the NDSBA committees ahead of and during the annual convention:

Governmental Affairs Committee:

Michelle Orton, Dickinson (chair)
Robin Nelson, Fargo
Lynn Carlson, Finley-Sharon
Terry Snider, Grand Forks
Collette Hertz, Harvey
Jason Rohr, Jamestown
Mike Lautenschlager, Lewis & Clark

Nominating Committee:

Katie Christensen Mineer, Fargo (chair)
Carrie Zachman, Beach
Michele Thorpe, Ellendale
Jeffrey Moberg, Tioga

Credentials Committee:

Tammy Gilstad, New Salem-Almont
Katie Christensen Mineer, Fargo
Michele Thorpe, Ellendale

Ballot Counting Committee:

Jenae Hunter, Alexander
Joel Lemer, Carrington

We need at least one more volunteer for the Ballot Counting Committee. Please contact Marci at Marci.Narum@ndsba.org if you are interested in volunteering.

NOTICE: NEW SECURITY SCREENING PROCEDURES at the Bismarck Event Center

The Bismarck Event Center has implemented new security screening procedures for all guests entering the facility. When you arrive for the convention, (Exhibit Hall Entrance, Door E42), you will pass through security checkpoints where personnel will conduct a brief visual inspection of bags.

Security screening will be in place throughout the event. If you leave the building during the day, you will be required to pass through security again when re-entering.

To help ensure a smooth experience, please allow a few extra minutes when you arrive. We appreciate your patience and cooperation and look forward to a great convention with you!

 MARK
your **calendar**

2026 NDSBA Annual Convention

Oct. 8-9

Bismarck Event Center, Bismarck

2027 NDSBA Winter Summit

Feb. 4-5, 2027

National Energy Center of Excellence, Bismarck

Local Government Capitol Connection

March 24-25, 2027

Bismarck Event Center, Bismarck

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North Dakota School
Boards Association
(Facebook and LinkedIn)

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