



EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, April 1, 2026
Pioneer Room, State Capitol
Bismarck, North Dakota

Representative Jim Jonas, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Members present: Representatives Jim Jonas, Collette Brown,* Jay Fisher, Matthew Heilman, Mike Motschenbacher, Eric J. Murphy, SuAnn Olson, David Richter, Mike Schatz; Senators Michelle Axtman, Jeff Barta,* Jose L. Castaneda, Ronald Sorvaag, Paul J. Thomas

Member absent: Representative Scott Louser

Others present: Representative LaurieBeth Hager, member of the Legislative Management; Cory Steiner,* Fargo Public Schools; Michael Preston,* West Fargo High School

See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

**Attended remotely*

It was moved by Senator Axtman, seconded by Representative Murphy, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the October 15, 2025, meeting be approved as distributed.

DUAL-CREDIT STUDY

Dr. Allen Burgad, Interim President and Dean of the School of Education, and Dr. James Boe, Dean of Graduate Studies and Extended Learning, Valley City State University, provided information regarding dual-credit program quality, faculty qualifications, curriculum, partner schools, student data and preparedness, and revenue and expenses (Appendices [B](#) and [C](#)). They noted:

- Dual-credit courses have the same academic rigor as college courses and are evaluated each semester.
- Policies and procedures for determining faculty qualifications also are used for dual-credit teachers and evaluations are done annually. Dual-credit faculty meet with department representatives twice per year to align the syllabus, assessments, and learning outcomes.
- The North Dakota University System's general education requirement transfer agreement is used to ensure transferability of course credit.
- Valley City State University (VCSU) supports 35 partner schools with 74 dual-credit faculty delivering coursework.
- During the 2025-26 school year, 1,063 students are projected to complete 5,539 credits and 130 students are expected to earn a college studies certificate.
- The University System subsidized tuition rate generated \$513,908 of revenue and stipends paid to dual-credit teachers totaled \$193,865, not including other direct costs and overhead.

In response to questions from committee members, Dr. Boe noted:

- The higher education funding formula provides an additional \$167 per credit for dual-credit courses. During the 2023-24 school year, total revenue received from tuition and through the

funding formula exceeded total cost, including allocated overhead cost, by approximately \$180,000.

- Overhead charged to the dual-credit program by VCSU includes salaries and program building, including tuition waivers provided to teachers pursuing dual-credit instruction qualifications.

Dr. Carmen Simone, President, Lake Region State College, provided information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding dual-credit courses. She noted:

- Approximately one-half of the students at Lake Region State College (LRSC) are in high school and they account for about one-third of the credits generated.
- In the 2025 fall semester, LRSC served 913 dual-credit students, of which 209 students were from Grand Forks schools, 83 students were from Devils Lake High School, 21 students were homeschooled, and the remaining 600 students were from 44 additional school districts.
- Approximately one-half of dual-credit students at LRSC are using traditional online courses taught by an online college instructor and the remaining dual-credit students are taking face-to-face college classes in the high school setting.
- Dual-credit teachers in a high school must have a minimum of a master's degree and 18 graduate credits in the subject area being taught. To build the dual-credit program, LRSC paid graduate tuition on behalf of several high school teachers.
- While dual-credit students require similar administrative processing, LRSC receives less tuition from a dual-credit student compared to a student on campus.

In response to questions from committee members, Dr. Simone noted:

- Each higher education institution offering dual-credit courses may negotiate different teacher reimbursement rates with school district partners, and arrangements vary by school district.
- Challenges to providing dual-credit courses in distant school districts include the time and travel necessary to build the relationships.

Dr. Cory Steiner, Superintendent, Fargo Public Schools, provided information ([Appendix E](#)) regarding dual-credit courses offered in the school district. He noted:

- Fargo Public Schools collaborates with North Dakota State University, Bismarck State College, VCSU, and North Dakota State College of Science, to offer 50 dual-credit courses to students.
- For the 2024-25 school year, Fargo Public Schools recorded 1,571 total student enrollments in dual-credit courses, compared to 1,395 in the previous school year.
- Fargo Public Schools has had encouraging outcomes in education-focused pathways and is discussing a partnership with a university to develop a "grow your own" model that would culminate in high school students, who choose education as a career, being hired at Fargo Public Schools when they graduate high school.
- A more aligned system of higher education is essential to fully realize dual-credit opportunities for students. Inconsistencies across institutions create barriers in student registration and enrollment processes, often requiring families and schools to navigate multiple systems, deadlines, and requirements. By establishing common practices and shared expectations, colleges can simplify access and reduce confusion.
- When higher education institutions have varying requirements for instructor qualifications or course alignment, it limits the number of educators who can participate and restricts program growth. Teacher credentialing and course approval also should be aligned and include clear transfer pathways for students.

In response to questions from committee members, Dr. Steiner noted:

- In Fargo Public Schools, nearly as many students take advanced placement classes as take dual-credit courses. For students achieving a grade of C or higher, dual-credit courses appear on a college transcript; however, an advanced placement student must achieve a qualifying examination score, set by the university, to earn credit for the class. The choice between dual-credit courses and advanced placement classes depends on the student's postsecondary plan.
- A majority of students in Fargo Public Schools take general courses; however, an increasing number of students are taking career and technical education courses.

Mr. Michael Preston, Teacher, West Fargo High School, provided information ([Appendix F](#)) regarding dual-credit courses. He noted:

- North Dakota State College of Science has provided the training to teach dual-credit courses and audits courses annually to ensure the curriculum and syllabi match their program.
- Some dual-credit courses do not meet college level rigor and there should be a better process to evaluate dual-credit courses.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Preston noted, to reduce the period of time between courses fundamental to their degree and mitigate knowledge loss, dual-credit teachers should encourage students to take certain foundational classes as seniors in high school.

Ms. Jean Bartz, Dual Credit Instructor, Drake-Anamoose School Districts, provided information ([Appendix G](#)) regarding the impact of dual-credit courses on students, including video and written testimony submitted by several former dual-credit students. She noted:

- Dual-credit courses prepare students by exposing them to different course delivery platforms.
- In most of the last 10 graduating classes, over 50 percent of the class has enrolled in dual-credit courses. During the 2025-26 school year, 9 of 12 seniors were enrolled in dual-credit courses and 2 students will graduate with associate of science degrees.
- A survey of current students indicates reasons for taking dual-credit courses include opportunity for advanced classes, cost-savings, understanding college expectations, one-on-one work environment, learning support system, and better understanding of course of study.

Ms. Bartz presented the video testimony of Mr. Zack Volson, Student, Minot State University, and Ms. Josie Ehrman, Student, Bismarck State College, and written testimony from former students, including Samantha Abonyi, Kristin Reinowski Volson, Kyle Volson, Jamie Lemer, Rachel Held, and Kathryn R. Jund.

In response to a question from a committee member, Ms. Kim Brandt, Principal, Drake-Anamoose School Districts, noted school district funds do not support dual-credit tuition; however, the school district provides funding for textbooks.

Mr. Levi Bachmeier, Superintendent of Public Instruction, provided information ([Appendix H](#)) regarding the cost of dual-credit courses and efficiencies. He noted:

- The subsidized tuition rate for dual credit is \$87.24 per credit and is assessed when instruction is provided by a qualified high school staff member who is also an approved adjunct instructor and the school district is paying most or all of the instructor's salary.
- The unsubsidized tuition rate for dual credit is \$154.36 and is assessed when instruction is provided by a qualified high school staff member who is also an approved adjunct instructor or an approved institution instructor and the institution is paying the instructor directly.
- The higher education funding formula reimburses colleges and universities for credit hours at rates that vary from \$79.57 to \$215.84 per credit hour.

- Revenue to colleges and universities through the higher education funding formula, when added to tuition paid by students for a three-credit course, could be as low as \$500 per course or as high as \$909 per course, depending on the institution.
- Because institutions are not paying teacher salaries, the costs of providing subsidized credits do not justify charging high school students tuition. Removing tuition charges for subsidized dual-credit courses would increase affordability and access to dual-credit courses without spending more government resources.
- Department goals include ending discrimination related to dual-credit access in rural schools and providing standardized procurement of dual-credit partners to ensure competition, efficiency, and equal access.
- The department's long-term vision includes students' ability to choose the institution from which they will earn credits.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Bachmeier noted:

- There is variability in academic rigor in dual credits across the state and quality control should be considered.
- State Board of Higher Education policy has based access to certain dual-credit programs on geography and not all students have the same access to dual-credit courses at the major universities as students living in certain counties with higher populations.
- It should be determined whether the state's goal is to provide recruitment opportunities and revenue to smaller colleges or individual student choice, because competition affects price and quality.

Committee members noted:

- The K-12 per student payment rate includes funding for teacher salaries and school districts are receiving formula payments, based on average daily membership, for students enrolled in unsubsidized dual-credit courses which are taught by an instructor paid by the college.
- Higher education formula reimbursement rates for colleges and universities are based on the cost of instruction and physical plant costs related to maintaining a college campus. Dual-credit courses that are taught in the school district and not on the college campus are reimbursed at the same rate even though there are no physical plant costs.
- If tuition for subsidized dual-credit courses is waived, college students would be required to pay for the same class high school students can take for free.

Ms. Brandt noted students are required to take a dual-credit course while in high school to qualify for the state scholarship which is a good recruiting tool for the state's colleges and universities. Students from families that can not afford the dual-credit course are not eligible for the state scholarship. She also expressed concern that if students receive free dual-credit courses, they may be less engaged.

OTHER COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. Rob Metz, Deputy Director, BARR Center, provided information ([Appendix I](#)) regarding the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) system. He noted:

- The BARR system is a K-12 coaching and training partner that works with schools for 3 years to train personnel in a more effective and efficient way to work. The BARR system was evaluated over a 10-year period by the American Institutes for Research for the federal Department of Education and the result was 21 statistically significant positive outcomes for students and teachers.
- Pillars include relationship building and data. The BARR system-selected teachers facilitate relationship building activities weekly and examine real-time data so needs are addressed sooner.

- The BARR system has been providing services in North Dakota for 5 years and served 47 schools during the 2025-26 school year.

Dr. Jason Germundson, Superintendent, Williston Basin School District #7, provided information ([Appendix J](#)) regarding the impact of the BARR system on schools in the district. He noted:

- Building relationships changes the culture of the district.
- The district has increased consistency in student monitoring, improved staff collaboration, and enhanced early identification of academic and behavioral concerns.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. Darla Ratzak, Chief Academic Officer, Williston Basin School District #7, noted:

- When the school district implemented the BARR system, the cost was \$80,000 per school each year for 3 years; however, the district paid approximately \$30,000 for three schools in the 1st year and a state grant program paid the balance.
- The district enrolled the remaining schools the next year. The school district has received a North Dakota Comprehensive Literacy Improvement through Measured Building Systems (ND CLIMBS) grant which will cover the cost of the BARR system.
- The BARR system has resulted in improvements in academic performance, attendance, and behavior indicators, and consistent documentation has resulted in improved data and clarity.
- The school district anticipates continuing some level of support after the initial 3-year period.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Metz noted that after 3 years, school districts may choose to maintain BARR system support. The cost to continue the BARR system is \$17,500 per year and includes materials and an annual visit. Various additional training sessions are available for additional fees.

Dr. Chris Larson, Superintendent, and Ms. Darci Weber, School Counselor, Milnor Public Schools, provided information ([Appendix K](#)) regarding the impact of the BARR system on schools in their district. They noted:

- Milnor Public Schools has worked with the BARR system for 3 years and because there has been little staff turnover, the district plans to use what they learned to maintain the system.
- The school district will use a ND CLIMBS grant to pay a BARR system coordinator.
- Intervention systems, data, and meetings were not always connected and the school district was able to take the structure of the BARR system and build it into the systems already in place. The system organizes all staff to provide more timely support.
- A team monitors key data points, including attendance, behavior referrals, secondary failure rates, eligibility, and elementary FastBridge scores. Over the past 3 years, the school district has seen growth and stability across each data point.
- BARR system meetings have allowed staff to approach behavior referrals as a team and coordinating strategies and maintaining consistency has significantly reduced referrals.
- The collaborative structure and shared responsibility BARR creates has played a role in strengthening staff culture.

Mr. Metz reviewed information ([Appendix L](#)) submitted by Dr. Steiner, regarding the impact of the BARR system on Fargo Public Schools. He noted:

- Fargo Public Schools has seven schools participating in the BARR system.
- Results include a reduction in failure rates and discipline referrals, academic growth, and improved attendance and mental health.

Mr. Matt Fetsch, Executive Director, North Dakota High School Activities Association, provided information ([Appendix M](#)) regarding an annual report and a new student athlete transfer rule. He noted:

- The North Dakota High School Activities Association is not associated with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), but is a nonprofit entity supported by revenue from ticket sales, television contracts, and sponsors. Any excess revenue is returned to member schools based on a points system.
- Beginning with the 2025-26 school year, the North Dakota High School Activities Association established a Hardship Appeals Committee.
- Beginning with the 2026-27 school year, a bylaw amendment provides a student who has previously transferred from one high school to another high school may return to the student's original high school of eligibility and be immediately fully eligible if the return is made at the beginning of the school year. The provision may only be exercised one time while the student is in grades 9 through 12.
- A sportsmanship grant program to schools offering in-person sportsmanship and fan behavior workshops was established beginning with the 2023-24 school year.
- A spectator ejection policy was adopted for the 2024-25 school year.

Dr. Mark Vollmer, Executive Director, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve Education Coordination Council, provided information ([Appendix N](#)) regarding an annual report ([Appendix O](#)) on the activities of the council pursuant to North Dakota Century Code Section 15.1-01-04(9). He noted:

- The council has 20 members and four subcommittees that work collaboratively with DPI and the Legislative Assembly on K-12 education issues. Subcommittees include support and innovation; statewide projects, duplication, and replication; aspirational goals; and legislative approval initiatives.
- Subcommittees are assigned various tasks, including setting goals; identifying barriers to student attendance and engagement; monitoring schools implementing mastery learning frameworks; and examining model schools, learn everywhere initiatives, and the influence of artificial intelligence.
- Research shows that chronic absenteeism is strongly associated with lower academic achievement, increased likelihood of grade retention, disengagement from school, and higher dropout rates.
- Over the past decade, North Dakota schools have experienced a steady decline in student attendance, with a significant reduction during and after the COVID-19 pandemic from which statewide attendance rates have not fully recovered.
- The state, supported by significant legislative funding and statewide coherence through the PK-12 Strategic Vision Framework and the work of the Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve Education Coordination Council, has made substantial progress in strengthening literacy, mathematics, and systemwide instructional quality. However, the impact of these efforts cannot be fully realized if students are not consistently present to benefit from them.
- A proposed study will help the state move from assumptions to evidence-based action by identifying the root causes of absenteeism, learning from schools that have successfully improved attendance, and developing actionable recommendations.

Ms. Mari Riehl, Assistant Director, Education Standards and Practices Board, provided information ([Appendix P](#)) regarding electronic satisfaction survey results of all interactions with individuals seeking information or services from the Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB) pursuant to Section 15.1-13-36. She noted:

- All applicants who receive email correspondence from ESPB staff or automated messages from the ND Teach system are prompted to complete the survey with nine questions, including two optional demographic questions and seven questions relating to timeliness, availability, courtesy,

knowledge, responsiveness of staff, and ease of obtaining information or services. Stakeholders may also leave comments.

- ESPB reviews the results monthly as part of its continuous improvement efforts.
- Survey results from the past 6 months show strong performance across all major customer service metrics. A small number of survey respondents identified challenges relating to unclear steps, difficulty with multistep login security features, and delayed communication as areas needing improvement.

Mr. Adam Tescher, School Finance Officer, Department of Public Instruction, presented a report regarding the financial condition of school districts entitled *School Finance Facts* ([Appendix Q](#)) pursuant to Section 15.1-02-09. He noted:

- The initial report was published in February 2026; however, school districts noted errors in mill levy data submitted by certain counties and a corrected report was published in March 2026. The report is available on the department's website.
- The annual report contains a statewide financial overview and school district level information regarding mill levies, expenditures and revenues, average cost per student, student enrollment, the number of teacher and administrator full-time equivalent positions, payroll information, state aid funding, and open enrollment.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Tescher noted the financial data collected in the new student information system will be the same and the reporting will look similar; however, there may be opportunities to modify and add certain reports.

Mr. Tescher presented a report regarding a compilation of annual school district employee compensation reports entitled *2024-2025 Employee Compensation Report* ([Appendix R](#)) pursuant to Section 15.1-02-13. He noted:

- Pursuant to Section 15.1-02-13, school districts are required to submit employee compensation information before September 11 of each year.
- The report includes data electronically submitted through the state automated reporting system (STARS) for school years ending in June of 2023, 2024, and 2025 and is available in detail, including listings of unidentified individual salaries, in a spreadsheet format on the department's website. For comparison purposes, the report only includes full-time licensed school district employees who have worked more than 144 days. The report does not include employees earning less than \$27,500, the minimum salary allowed for a teacher.
- The number of administrators statewide increased from 700 in 2023 to 736 in 2025, while the number of teachers increased from 9,699 to 9,910 during the same period. Administrators include principals, superintendents, directors, assistant principals, assistant or deputy superintendents, and assistant directors. Teachers include coordinators, counselors, instructional programmers, library media specialists, special education consultants, pupil personnel, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, supervisors, teachers, and tutors in training.
- The average base salary for administrators increased from \$107,826 to \$114,127, or 5.8 percent, from 2023 to 2025. The average base salary for teachers increased 6.5 percent, from \$57,496 to \$61,229, over the same period.
- In 2025, one school district did not complete the compensation report. The same district did not complete the required finance report and as a result the department was required to withhold state school aid beginning in November 2025.

Ms. Amanda Peterson, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Accountability and Engagement, Department of Public Instruction, presented a report ([Appendix S](#)) regarding the implementation of intervention measures for chronically low-performing schools pursuant to Section 15.1-02-23. She noted:

- All schools in the state receive department support. Within the state's system of support, schools are designated as general support and improvement, targeted support and improvement (TSI), or comprehensive support and improvement (CSI). A school designated as a CSI school may also be designated as a fostering improved results for school transformation (ND FIRST) school.
- Designations are based on graduation rates, subgroup performance, and state assessment rankings.
- As of October 2025, there are 17 schools designated as TSI schools and 19 schools designated as CSI schools, of which 9 schools are designated as ND FIRST schools. Approximately 8 percent of public school enrollment, or 9,113 students, attend TSI and CSI school districts.
- Schools designated as TSI or CSI are required to notify parents of the designation and have the opportunity to apply for a federally funded school improvement grant of up to \$75,000 per year.
- Some of the funding provided by the Legislative Assembly for the ND FIRST Program has been used for a pay-for-performance support contract which provides payment for certain outcomes. Expectations are set with 18- and 36-month benchmarks and the department is in the process of drafting memorandums of understanding with ND FIRST school districts.

Ms. Peterson informed the committee that the department is considering amendments ([Appendix T](#)) to the state accountability plan, required under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, in March 2027. She noted Section 15.1-02-17 requires, before the Superintendent of Public Instruction may submit proposed changes to the United States Secretary of Education, the Superintendent must present the proposed changes to an interim committee designated by the Legislative Management.

Mr. Tescher, presented a report ([Appendix U](#)) on the categories and amount spent by each school district on school safety and security measures during the previous school year pursuant to Section 15.1-07-36. He noted:

- During the 2024-25 school year, school districts reported statewide expenditures related to school safety and security measures totaling \$80.5 million, including \$70.9 million for remodeling and capital expenditures. Remodeling and capital expenditures included entrances, flooring, roofs, sidewalks, curbing, fencing, playground upgrades, and infrastructure modernization.
- Other expenditures included security personnel (\$5.8 million), costs related to security technology and equipment (\$2.7 million), and other expenses, including security planning and preparedness (\$1.1 million).
- School districts reported various efforts to strengthen emergency preparedness, including fire safety inspections, cardiopulmonary resuscitation and active shooter response training, coordination with local emergency agencies, and regular drills.

A member of the committee suggested the department provide clarity to school districts regarding the reporting of capital expenditures to ensure only safety projects relating to unauthorized access, as noted in Section 15.1-07-36, are included in the report.

Mr. Stanley Schauer, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Data and Assessment, Department of Public Instruction, provided information ([Appendix V](#)) regarding the testing instrument, the methodology used to test and assess students, established cut scores, the methodology used to determine cut scores, validation of all test products, test scores, and the significance of the test scores pursuant to Section 15.1-21-10. He noted:

- Since last reporting to an interim committee, the department has changed testing instruments. The North Dakota Academic Progression of Learning and Understanding of Students (ND A+) is a new system of assessments the department created. The North Dakota Alternate Assessment (NDAA) is designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
- ND A+ is a system of three assessments, including the ND A+ state summative assessment, which is included in the department's report, and the ND A+ interims and ND A+ classroom formative assessments, the results of which are not included in the department's report.

- Mathematics and English language arts assessments are administered in grades 3, 8, and 10 and science assessments are administered in grades 4, 8, and 10.
- The primary purpose of the ND A+ is to provide state longitudinal academic achievement data and to allow for school to school and district to district comparisons. Because the assessment was first administered during the 2024-25 school year, longitudinal academic achievement data comparisons are not possible until next year and scores and percentages of performance levels should not be compared to the prior state assessment.
- Student level data is reported to school districts and includes one of four performance levels. The performance level is based on the student's scale score and is identified as novice, approaching proficient, proficient, or advanced.
- Statewide, test scores indicated 40 percent of students were proficient or advanced in English language arts, 41 percent were proficient or advanced in mathematics, and 38 percent were proficient or advanced in science. Each school and district will have its own data set. Data is available by school on the department's Insights of North Dakota website.
- Even though the state assessment data indicates a low percentage of students is proficient in mathematics, when compared to other states administering the ACT test to 80 percent or more of their students, North Dakota is tied for the top average mathematics score.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Schauer noted the contract with the current vendor is 10 plus years and because a linking study can maintain the longitudinal data, if the state keeps the same vendor, there should be no need to draft a new test when standards change.

Ms. Brenda Ehrmantraut, Assistant Director of Academic Support, Department of Public Instruction, provided information ([Appendix W](#)) regarding the implementation and effectiveness of reading curriculum and professional development training requirements in improving educational outcomes and reading competency of students pursuant to Section 15.1-21-12.1. She noted:

- All kindergarten through grade 3 school buildings must report to the department regarding science of reading professional development, school curriculum, and processes, including assessments and resources to diagnose, monitor, and inform reading instruction that meets each child's unique needs.
- Based on the degree of alignment with science of reading professional development, curriculum, and assessment requirements, schools may be required to report every year, every other year, or every 3rd year.
- The department collaborates with regional education associations to provide support, guidance, and unified messaging with regard to science of reading curriculum and professional development.
- Because Section 15.1-21-12.1 requires all teachers and principals in kindergarten through grade 3 school buildings receive science of reading professional development, regional education associations have developed professional development for teachers who are not primarily reading instructors.
- Approximately 1,500 professionals have also completed a more in depth 2-year Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling course in reading instruction commonly referred to as LETRS.

Ms. Ehrmantraut provided information ([Appendix X](#)) regarding dyslexia screening, intervention, and professional development. She noted:

- Pursuant to Section 15.1-32-26, each school district must screen children 7 years of age and younger for dyslexia, assess risk factors, provide interventions, monitor student progress, and provide professional development.

- In 2021, the department added a specialist trained in dyslexia credentialing and 23 individuals have received the credential.
- Funding provided for dyslexia is used to contract for coursework and to provide grants for professional development and credentialing.

Ms. Ehrmantraut provided information ([Appendix Y](#)) regarding the Amira Learning reading tool. She noted:

- Amira Learning is an online reading tutor available to all school districts in the state and offered in 72 school districts. The reading tool was used by 7,543 students during the 2025-26 school year.
- The department has received a federal Education Innovation and Research Grant. The grant is a partnership between DPI, Amira Learning, and WestEd. Grant funding will total \$10 million over the next 5 years and will be used to expand artificial intelligence-enabled tutoring statewide and support local integration for the Amira Learning reading tool in kindergarten through grade 5.

Ms. Ehrmantraut provided information ([Appendix Z](#)) regarding the Waterford Upstart Program. She noted:

- Waterford Upstart is a online prekindergarten program provided to increase access to early learning experiences in high-need communities.
- The department was authorized \$1.5 million of one-time funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to administer the program during the 2025-27 biennium.
- Based on grade 3 proficiency, the state has identified 64 communities in which families can register for the free program.
- The goal is to register 550 children each year of the biennium. Identifying and registering families for the program has been challenging and the department enrolled 159 children during the 2025-26 fiscal year.

Ms. Kate Waechter, Assistant Director of Academic Support, Department of Public Instruction, provided information ([Appendix AA](#)), pursuant to Section 15.1-21-12.3, regarding the implementation of a new section to Chapter 15.1-21 created to improve educational outcomes and student competency in mathematics. She distributed a timeline of actions ([Appendix BB](#)) and summary of the essentials of mathematics instruction ([Appendix CC](#)). She noted:

- Department, regional education association, and school district collaboration to unify messaging around mathematics curriculum and professional development has been established as the North Dakota Cultivating Outcomes through Unified Teacher Support (ND COUNTS) Program.
- Administrative rules related to the program were established in 2025 and the ND COUNTS pilot program began in January 2026 with 17 school districts. Participating schools must implement regular formative assessments to gauge student progress and identify learning gaps.
- Professional development for grades 4 through 8 teachers is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2026 and professional development for teachers in kindergarten through grade 3 is required after June 30, 2027. Student information system report development is anticipated in late 2027.

In response to a question from a committee member, Ms. Waechter noted:

- Mathematics training was provided before the legislation, but was not fully aligned with the statute.
- The department has met with the ESPB and with the University System to discuss the alignment of their standards to the statute.

Chairman Jonas noted the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for September 2026.

No further business appearing, Chairman Jonas adjourned the meeting at 4:41 p.m.

Sheila M. Sandness
Senior Fiscal Analyst

ATTACH:29