Legislative Council
600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck, ND 58505

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS COMMITTEE

Thursday, June 18, 2026
Memorial Union, Ballroom B, North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota
Friday, June 19, 2026
Mildred Johnson Library, Room 106, North Dakota State College of Science, Wahpeton, North Dakota

Senator Jonathan Sickler, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. at North Dakota State University (NDSU).

Members present: Senators Jonathan Sickler, Josh Boschee,* Robert Erbele, Scott Meyer,* Mike Wobbema; Representatives Landon Bahl,** LaurieBeth Hager, Bob Martinson, Mark Sanford; Citizen Members Ann Ellefson, Genevieve Goven, Sarah Hall Lovas,*** Brent Sanford,** Terri Zimmerman

Members absent: Citizen Members Kevin Black, Maxwell Eriksrud, Brent Lohnes

Others present: Senators Kyle Davison* and Ronald Sorvaag, members of the Legislative Management

Representative Alisa Mitskog

Sheri R. Veil, Alyssa Hodges, Ethan Blesie, Ayden Frohlich, and Stacy Duffield, North Dakota State University; Beth Demke, North Dakota Gateway to Science; Stephen Wonderlich and Kristine Steffen, Sanford Research; Dante Battocchi, Elinor Coatings; Jon McTaggart, Sagency; Lisa Montplaisir, State Board of Higher Education; Lee Schwartz, Rod Flanigan, Gavin Gill, Kyle Armitage, and Deb Smith, North Dakota State College of Science; Jim Albrecht, ComDel Innovation; Carmen Simone, Lake Region State College; Bernell Hirning, Williston State College; Scott Molander, Dickinson State University; Brenda Zastoupil, North Dakota University System; Abby Finke, Berthold; William Wendorf, West Fargo; Oleksandra Tarnavchyk, Fargo

See Appendix A for additional persons present.

**Attended only on June 18, 2026*

***Attended in person on June 18, 2026, and remotely on June 19, 2026*

****Attended only on June 19, 2026*

It was moved by Representative Sanford, seconded by Representative Bahl, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the April 8-9, 2026, meeting be approved as distributed.

Dr. Marshall Stewart, President, North Dakota State University, presented an overview (Appendix B) of the institution. He noted NDSU had a fall 2025 headcount enrollment of 11,952 students, of whom 7,683 were enrolled in at least one distance education course.

Dr. Sheri R. Veil, Provost, North Dakota State University, commented regarding tuition waivers, scholarship optimization, student recruitment, research, and academic program changes. She noted 29 academic programs were identified for closure or consolidation, of which 8 have been terminated, 14 have been inactivated, and 7 are in the process of being phased out as students complete the program.

Ms. Alyssa Hodges, Student, North Dakota State University, commented regarding her experience at NDSU.

Mr. Ethan Blesie, Student, North Dakota State University, commented regarding his experience at NDSU.

Mr. Ayden Frohlich, Student, North Dakota State University, commented regarding his experience at NDSU.

Ms. Beth Demke, Chief Executive Officer, North Dakota Gateway to Science, commented regarding the partnership between the North Dakota Gateway to Science and NDSU.

Dr. Stephen Wonderlich, Interim President and Chief of Behavioral Health Research, Sanford Research, commented regarding the partnership between Sanford Research and NDSU.

Dr. Kristine Steffen, Director of Biomedical Research, Sanford Research, commented regarding her research partnerships with NDSU.

Dr. Stewart commented regarding shared services and collaboration with other North Dakota University System institutions, including the provision of business services for Dickinson State University (DSU) and payroll services for the North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS), Williston State College, Mayville State University, and Dakota College at Bottineau.

Dr. Stacy Duffield, Director, Office of Teaching and Learning, North Dakota State University, commented regarding the Governor's School Program at NDSU.

Ms. Abby Finke, Berthold, commented regarding her experience with the Governor's School.

Mr. William Wendorf, West Fargo, commented regarding his experience with the Governor's School.

Ms. Oleksandra Tarnavchyk, Fargo, commented regarding her experience with the Governor's School.

Dr. Dante Battocchi, Co-Founder and Chief Technology Officer, Elinor Coatings, commented regarding his relationship with NDSU.

Dr. Stewart commented regarding community outreach, athletics, and philanthropy at NDSU.

In response to questions from committee members:

- Chairman Sickler noted the 2025 Legislative Assembly expanded the Student Financial Assistance Program to provide additional needs-based scholarship funding for resident students.
- Mr. Brent Sanford, Commissioner, North Dakota University System, indicated the University System has not experienced a significant impact on the enrollment of students from Minnesota in response to Minnesota's implementation of the North Star Promise Program.
- Dr. Stewart noted he believes on-campus learning provides the best student experience, but an online option for academic programs is a necessity.
- Dr. Stewart indicated a conversation regarding state funding for athletics needs to occur. He noted the importance of athletics to the university and the people it serves, and any funding will need to consider the culture and values of the people of the state.

Mr. Jon McTaggart, Senior Advisor, Sagency, presented information (Appendix C) regarding the University System alignment project, including the results of a survey of stakeholders. He noted:

- There is no shared definition of system-level success, and understanding the role of the University System office varies widely.
- Credit-hour funding drives program expansion without a system-level priority to measure against, and mission boundaries have blurred as institutions have expanded into overlapping program areas.

- Policy expectations are interpreted differently by the various campuses and there is confusion regarding accountability for not meeting desired outcomes.
- Stakeholders questioned whether the state can sustain 11 institutions at the current scale, but the campuses are regional anchors and community assets.
- Stakeholders described specific, visible administrative duplication, but shared services fail when they are imposed, distant, or slower than campuses providing the services themselves.
- Leaders default to established patterns or programs when failure carries disproportionate reputational or political risk.
- Transfer credit failures impose real costs on students.

In response to a request from Chairman Sickler, Mr. Alex Cronquist, Senior Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Council, distributed a copy of the Sagency report (Appendix D).

Committee members expressed concern regarding the small sample size and the process of selecting individuals to be interviewed for the survey.

Mr. Sanford commented regarding the compliance review of DSU. He noted the compliance review is not yet complete.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Sanford noted the University System and campuses are working to finalize a contract to clarify the business services relationship between DSU and NDSU. He added an appropriate level of reimbursement will be determined.

Dr. Lisa Montplaisir, Faculty Advisor, State Board of Higher Education, presented testimony (Appendix E) on behalf of the Council of College Faculties regarding the committee's assigned study and duties. She noted:

- Faculty are occasionally shared across multiple campuses, but each campus keeps the number of credits below a 0.5 full-time equivalent level to avoid paying benefits.
- When reviewing low-completion academic programs, consideration should also be given to the number of students who benefit from the program, rather than only the number of students graduating from a program.
- University System institutions operate on a 17-week semester, whereas a 16-week semester is most common nationally and both Minnesota and Montana offer a 15-week semester.

Ms. Lisa Johnson, Deputy Commissioner for Academic and Student Affairs, North Dakota University System office, commented regarding transferability of credits in the University System. She noted the University System is regarded nationally as a system with student-friendly credit transfer procedures, but the transferability involves a lot of work by staff across the system to ensure common course numbering and descriptions among the campuses. She added that the University System office anticipates requesting an appropriation of $120,000 of ongoing funding from the 2027 Legislative Assembly to implement a new information technology system to assist with the transfer of credits among institutions.

Ms. Johnson presented information (Appendix F) regarding low-producing academic programs at University System institutions. She noted 38 academic programs have been terminated in 2026, including multiple degrees and certificates in foreign languages and other liberal arts programs.

Ms. Jamie Wilke, Director of Finance, North Dakota University System office, presented information (Appendix G) regarding anticipated funding requests for the 2027-29 biennium. She noted:

- The funding requests have not yet been approved by the State Board of Higher Education.
- Information technology requests include:

  $4.2 million for increased Information Technology Department costs.

$2.5 million for software service inflation.

- Capital project requests include:

  $75 million for a deferred maintenance pool, of which $2.5 million could be used for a facility and space utilization assessment and long-term strategic plan development.

  $148.9 million for a health professions addition at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

- Other requests include:

  $42 million to continue the Workforce Education Innovation Fund Program, NDSU New Horizons programming, and the University of North Dakota National Security Crossroads.

  $40 million for the Challenge Grant Program.

  $26.5 million for Tiers II and III of the University System Capital Building Fund Program.

The committee recessed at 3:38 p.m. and reconvened at 9:01 a.m. on Friday, June 19, 2026, at NDSCS.

Mr. Lee Schwartz, Director, Marketing and Communications, North Dakota State College of Science, welcomed the committee to NDSCS.

Dr. Rod Flanigan, President, North Dakota State College of Science, presented an overview (Appendix H) of the institution. He noted that, excluding dual-credit students, 57.4 percent of students enrolled at NDSCS were North Dakota residents and 33.2 percent were Minnesota residents.

Mr. Gavin Gill, Student, North Dakota State College of Science, commented regarding his experience at NDSCS.

Dr. Flanigan commented regarding capital needs at the campus, noting multiple residence halls were planned for demolition and deferred maintenance in the institution's central heating plant needs to be addressed.

Mr. Kyle Armitage, Dean, Career and Technical Education, North Dakota State College of Science, commented regarding precision agriculture at the college.

Ms. Deb Smith, Dean, Allied Health and Nursing, North Dakota State College of Science, commented regarding proposals submitted by the college to receive federal rural health funding for a community health worker program at the college.

Mr. Jim Albrecht, President, ComDel Innovation, commented regarding industry relationships with NDSCS.

Ms. Smith commented regarding an NDSCS request for funding to remodel the Mildred Johnson Library into academic space for allied health programs. She noted the renovated space would allow for enrollment growth and improve quality in the nursing, dental, and occupational therapy assistant programs.

Ms. Wilke presented information (Appendix I) regarding the cost of delivering dual credit across the state. She noted University System institutions:

- Generated $13.7 million of revenue from dual credit during the 2024-25 academic year, including $5.3 million from tuition and fees and $8.4 million from the General Fund through the higher education funding formula.
- Incurred $3 million in direct costs relating to dual credit during the 2024-25 academic year.
- Allocated $11.6 million in indirect costs, including operational overhead and campus facilities, to dual credit during the 2024-25 academic year.

Dr. Carmen Simone, President, Lake Region State College, commented regarding the cost of providing dual-credit courses. She noted situations in which a student enrolled in an online dual-credit course requires in-person supervision or support by the high school, and Lake Region State College pays the high school to provide that support.

Dr. Bernell Hirning, President, Williston State College, commented regarding the cost of providing dual-credit courses.

Mr. Scott Molander, President, Dickinson State University, commented regarding dual-credit courses at DSU.

Dr. Simone commented regarding dual-credit courses at Lake Region State College.

In response to a question from a committee member, Ms. Johnson noted advanced placement courses are primarily available only in the larger high schools in the state.

Ms. Brenda Zastoupil, Director of Financial Aid, North Dakota University System office, presented a bill draft [27.0178.01000] regarding statewide student financial assistance programs, including Career Builders, the Scholars Program, and the Professional Student Exchange Program. She noted the bill draft would:

- Clarify eligibility for the Skilled Workforce Student Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs, known collectively as Career Builders.
- Adjust eligibility for the Professional Student Exchange Program to allow eligibility for all students who graduated from a North Dakota high school rather than all current residents of the state.
- Clarify eligibility and the selection process for the Scholars Program.
- Increase funding for the Student Financial Assistance Program ($1,000,000), Scholars Program ($5,444,116), and Professional Student Exchange Program ($300,000) line items.

Ms. Zastoupil added that the intent of the University System office is for $2 million of the increased funding in the bill draft to be provided from a reduction to the supplemental student financial assistance grant line item in the University System's appropriation bill.

Chairman Sickler noted the committee would further consider the bill draft at its next meeting.

No further business appearing, Chairman Sickler adjourned the meeting at 12:20 p.m.

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Alex J. Cronquist
Senior Fiscal Analyst

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Casey Orvedal
Counsel

ATTACH:9