



# North Dakota House of Representatives

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## Representative Anna Novak

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## COMMITTEES:

Education  
Energy and Natural Resources (Vice Chair)

March 18, 2025

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Anna Novak, representative from district 33. House Bill 1476 directs the state to do an assessment of all of the public school buildings in North Dakota and to study appropriate criteria standards for public school buildings. The version of the bill being discussed today is amended, and you should all have a copy of the bill. The only change from the version passed in the House is that this version has an appropriation.

This is my second session in the legislature and my second session sitting on the Education committee. Last session, we dealt with a few different bills that made it obvious to the committee that there is a lot of inequity across the state when it comes to education. I think everyone recognizes that there are going to be pros and cons when living in an urban or rural district. Living in Hazen, my kids don't have hundreds of in-person course offerings available; however, they have smaller class sizes and my kids' teachers go above and beyond for them, which is one of the many reasons I love living where I do.

The inequity I'm referring to has to do with severe underfunding, which is why the "School Funding Task Force" interim committee was created at the conclusion of the 68<sup>th</sup> legislative session. I sat on the committee. During the interim, we discussed problems with the school funding formula, relating to schools not receiving enough money to operate even a skeleton crew of teachers, very high transportation costs because they have a large in land sized school district, and schools that have an incredible amount of deferred maintenance that they just cannot currently afford to deal with, and quite frankly may never be able to afford because they don't have enough residents to spread the loan out amongst.

A group of educators and other interested persons formed the "School Construction Coalition" and did a generic assessment of a few schools in the state. They presented their results to our committee during the interim and I was shocked and saddened by what they shared with us. Many of the schools were in such disrepair that I'd hate for my children to be forced to learn in those conditions. I was embarrassed by what I saw. The School Construction Coalition is here today, and I'll let them tell their own story.

North Dakota's constitution says that our state has a responsibility to offer a quality public school education to students grades K-12. But we are in a situation in which many of our school buildings are in really tough condition. I've heard people say things like the previous administrators in these schools are to blame because they continued to kick the can down the road on deferred maintenance. But I disagree with that. In a small school district like mine, they would have to defer any other sort of maintenance for something like 10 years to deal with replacing just the boiler. So, no gymnasium floor refinishing, no new windows or doors, no updates to the parking lot, etc. It's just not feasible with their small budgets.

HB1476 does not fix the issue. But we don't know how big of an issue we are dealing with until an assessment is done. This is the starting point needed to get the ball rolling. As I mentioned, the School Construction Coalition is here and will present to you.

The House Appropriations committee removed the funding that was attached to this bill. At that time, I was told there was a plan to get it added to the DPI budget. However, I spoke with the chair of the Senate E&E division yesterday and the funding is not there, and it doesn't sound like there's a plan to put it in. However, it was recommended that I add it back into this bill so it's related to the policy side of it, which is the version of the bill in front of you today. The funding is needed to initiate and complete the assessment. Without the appropriation, this bill is essentially an unfunded mandate.

I hope you will support North Dakota kids by voting in favor of amended HB1476. With that, I'll stand for any questions. Thank you!

Sixty-ninth  
Legislative Assembly  
of North Dakota

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO  
SECOND ENGROSSMENT**

**REENGROSSED HOUSE BILL NO. 1476**

Introduced by

Representatives Novak, Heinert, Nelson, Richter, Schreiber-Beck

Senator Kessel

1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15.1-02 of the North Dakota  
2 Century Code, relating to the assessment of all public school buildings: and to provide an  
3 appropriation.

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:**

5 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 15.1-02 of the North Dakota Century Code is created  
6 and enacted as follows:

7 **School buildings - Assessment - Rules.**

8 The superintendent of public instruction:

- 9 1. Shall collect regularly conducted assessments by school districts of each building  
10 located on school grounds in the state, including the interior and exterior of the  
11 building, doors, windows, fire sprinklers, fire protection systems, components of  
12 heating, cooling, plumbing, electrical, and security systems, and handicap accessibility  
13 features.
- 14 2. Shall, every four years, document the inventory of buildings, including building type,  
15 original construction year, facility additions, facility addition construction year, and  
16 facility square footage as submitted by school districts.
- 17 3. Develop and maintain a system for tracking the assessments of buildings, including  
18 construction, repairs, modifications, and maintenance recommended for each school.
- 19 4. Shall adopt rules under chapter 28-32 to implement this section.

- 1        5. May contract for professional services to implement this section, including contracting  
2        to study appropriate criteria to establish for public school facility standards.

3        **SECTION 2. APPROPRIATION - DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION - SCHOOL**  
4        **BUILDING ASSESSMENTS - ONE-TIME FUNDING.** There is appropriated out of any moneys  
5        in the general fund in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, the sum of \$4,000,000, or  
6        so much of the sum as may be necessary, to the department of public instruction for the  
7        purpose of providing for a statewide facilities assessment, for the biennium beginning July 1,  
8        2025, and ending June 30, 2027. The funding provided in this section is considered a one-time  
9        funding item.