



EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, September 24, 2024
Roughrider Room, State Capitol
Bismarck, North Dakota

Senator Michelle Axtman, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Members present: Senators Michelle Axtman, Todd Beard, Cole Conley, Jay Elkin, Justin Gerhardt, Kent Weston; Representatives LaurieBeth Hager, Patrick Hatlestad, Dori Hauck, Pat D. Heinert, Jim Jonas, Donald W. Longmuir, David Monson*, Eric James Murphy, David Richter, Cynthia Schreiber-Beck, Kelby Timmons*

Members absent: Senator Judy Estenson; Representatives Andrew Marschall, Mitch Ostlie

Others present: Senator Donald Schaible, Mott, member of the Legislative Management

Kirsten Baesler and Stan Schauer, Department of Public Instruction; Mike Bitz, Mandan Public School District; Daniel Conn, North Dakota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; Missy Eidsness* and Holly Fiechtner*, Fargo Public School District; Jeff Fastnacht, Bismarck Public School District; Michelle Fockler* and Jaalil Hart*, The Hunt Institute; Derek Gackle*, Yellowstone Public School District; Todd Kaylor*, Minot Public School District; Kay Larson, Department of Health and Human Services; Marcus Lewton, Dickinson Public School District; Alyssa Martin, North Dakota Center for Distance Education; Wayne Sick, Department of Career and Technical Education; Chip Sundberg, Ellendale Public School District; Erik Sveet, TGU Public School District; and Vincent Williams, West Fargo Public School District

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

*Attended remotely

It was moved by Representative Longmuir, seconded by Representative Jonas, and carried on a voice vote that the minutes of the August 14, 2024, meeting be approved as distributed.

REPORTS

Department of Public Instruction

Statewide Prekindergarten Through Grade Twelve Education Strategic Vision

Ms. Kirsten Baesler, Superintendent of Public Instruction, provided a report (Appendices [B](#), [C](#), and [D](#)), as required under North Dakota Century Code Section 15.1-02-04(9), regarding an update on the strategic vision and the collaborative report of the strategic plans of each steering committee member entity receiving state education funds. She noted the steering committee identified long-term outcomes for students, which are to:

- Reduce the disparity in achievement for students with disabilities, students in poverty, and Native American students;
- Increase the number of students who enter kindergarten prepared to learn, and increase the number of kindergarten classrooms that meet the needs of every learner;
- Increase the number of students who demonstrate reading proficiency in third grade;
- Increase the number of students who meet expected learning gains each year;
- Increase the number of students who engage in learning; and
- Increase the number of students who graduate "choice ready".

Ms. Kay Larson, Director, Early Childhood Division, Department of Health and Human Services, provided an update on the strategic vision regarding quality early childhood experiences.

Ms. Kayla Stastny, Administrator of Behavioral Health and Education, Department of Health and Human Services, provided an update on the strategic vision regarding support for safe and healthy behaviors.

In response to a question from a committee member, Ms. Stastny noted the Behavioral Health in Education Resources and Opportunities Grant, Behavioral Health School Grant, Prevention and Early Intervention Pilot Grant, and Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Grant resulted in decreases in referrals for behavioral issues, fewer students being removed from the classroom for disciplinary reasons, and less travel time for parents to receive services.

Mr. Wayde Sick, Director, Department of Career and Technical Education, provided an update on the strategic vision regarding career awareness, exploration, and development. He noted:

- Multiple agencies and organizations are instrumental in helping students transition from an educational setting to a career.
- One example is the Office of Specially Designed Services of the Department of Public Instruction which collaborates with various organizations to enhance employment opportunities and aid in the transition processes for youth with disabilities.

Dr. Daniel Conn, President, North Dakota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, provided an update on the strategic vision regarding quality education personnel. He noted the number of college students entering teacher education programs is declining, but the opportunity for paraprofessionals to become teachers has contributed to the recruitment of students entering the special education teacher programs.

Dr. Alyssa Martin, Director, North Dakota Center for Distance Education, provided an update on the strategic vision regarding quality student-centered education.

In response to a question from a committee member, Dr. Martin noted she hopes to see an increase in the use of competency-based grading, which requires teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses of students based on standards to provide targeted instruction to improve student outcomes.

Academic Performance Metrics of Students in Virtual Instruction

Mr. Stan Schauer, Director of Assessment, Department of Public Instruction, provided a report ([Appendix E](#)), as required under Section 15.1-07-25.4, regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction versus those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals. Due to the low number of reporting school districts, each participating district delivered its own report under Section 15.1-07-25.4.

Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent, Bismarck Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix F](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

In response to a question from a committee member, Dr. Fastnacht noted if a student is a danger to his or herself or others, parents, administrators, and agencies may discuss placement options for the student, which may include a virtual school.

Ms. Holly Fiechtner, Associate Superintendent, and Ms. Missy Eidsness, Virtual Academy Principal, Fargo Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix G](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

In response to a question from a committee member, Ms. Fiechtner and Ms. Eidsness noted:

- Nontraditional students, particularly students who live independently, prefer the virtual school option.
- The virtual academy brings students together for activities and athletics to encourage social interaction.
- The socialization aspect of school is important, particularly at the elementary level.
- Students are monitored and those not meeting performance expectations are encouraged to transition back to the traditional school model.

Mr. Vincent Williams, Assistant Superintendent, West Fargo Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix H](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Williams noted, to address the lower percentage of virtual students taking the state assessments compared with traditional students, students must agree to take the state assessment when applying to participate in the virtual school.

Mr. Chip Sundberg, Superintendent, Ellendale Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix I](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

Dr. Mike Bitz, Superintendent, Mandan Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix J](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

Dr. Marcus Lewton, Superintendent, Dickinson Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix K](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

Mr. Kelly Koppinger, Superintendent, South Heart Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix L](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

Mr. Todd Kaylor, Secondary Assistant Superintendent, Minot Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix M](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

Mr. Erik Sveet, Superintendent, TGU Towner Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix N](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

Mr. Derek Gackle, Principal and Superintendent, Yellowstone Public School District, provided a report ([Appendix O](#)) regarding a comparison of the academic performance of students participating in virtual instruction with those not participating in virtual instruction using the statewide strategic vision framework goals.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Gackle noted:

- The distance between virtual students who attend Yellowstone Public School's virtual school and the school building hinders the administering of in-person state assessments.
- The option to administer the state assessment virtually would increase participation in the state assessment.

Statewide Test Scores

Mr. Schauer provided a report ([Appendix P](#)), as required under Section 15.1-21-10, regarding a compilation of test scores aligned to the state content standards in reading, mathematics, and science. He noted:

- The 2023-24 assessment reflected an overall student proficiency of 45 percent in English language arts and 40 percent in mathematics across all grade levels. Statewide, student proficiency is trending upward toward prepandemic proficiency numbers. In 2018-19, proficiency in English language arts was 47 percent and proficiency in mathematics was 45 percent.
- The data sources for the report are ND Insights, the State Automated Reporting System, and the Centralized Reporting System. The State Automated Reporting System is a tool that could be utilized more frequently to analyze individual student data.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Schauer noted North Dakota students perform consistently in the top 25 percent among all states.

SCHOOL CHOICE MODELS STUDY

Mr. Jaalil Hart, Interim Director, Kindergarten through Grade Twelve, and Ms. Michelle Fockler, Managing Director, The Hunt Institute, presented testimony ([Appendix Q](#)) regarding stakeholder listening session feedback from the North Dakota Educational Opportunities Task Force. Mr. Hart noted the key takeaways from the community sessions are that parents:

- Prefer options for their child's education and school choice allows for personalized learning experiences. Parents see customization as essential for academic and personal growth.

- Seek access to specialized programs and diverse curricula and school choice offers exposure to science, technology, engineering and mathematics, arts-focused, and vocational training options. Parents see choice as an opportunity to better prepare children for the future.
- Face significant barriers such as cost, transportation, and distance. Rural families often have fewer or no realistic options for school choice. The need for equitable access and support to overcome these barriers is crucial.
- Are concerned regarding equitable admissions practices in private and charter schools.
- Seek safer, higher-quality environments for their children.
- View consistent standards across all schools as essential for fairness.

Mr. Hart noted the key takeaways from the educators sessions included:

- Educators emphasize the need for consistent accountability across all schools. Public funds should be accompanied by strict oversight to maintain high standards. Schools must meet the same academic and testing requirements as public schools.
- Diverting public funds to private or charter schools can weaken public education. Educators worry about reduced resources, especially in rural and low-income areas. Public school resources are critical to supporting vulnerable students.
- Geographic isolation and limited school alternatives hinder rural implementation of school choice. Rural educators struggle with fewer resources and available options. Educators highlight the need for fair policies that address these geographic disparities.
- Educators would like all students, especially those with special needs and language barriers, to have access to education. Educators advocate for inclusivity and fairness in admissions policies, and strongly support maintaining the public school system's inclusive standards.

In response to a question from a committee member, Mr. Hart noted the individuals who were invited and participated in the task force represented a variety of constituents, including individuals from different geographies and various types of schools across the state.

It was moved by Representative Richter, seconded by Representative Longmuir, and carried on a voice vote that the Chairman and the Legislative Council staff be requested to prepare a report and to present the report to the Legislative Management.

It was moved by Representative Richter, seconded by Senator Elkin, and carried on a voice vote that the committee be adjourned sine die.

No further business appearing, Chairman Axtman adjourned the committee sine die at 2:32 p.m.

Liz Fordahl
Counsel

ATTACH:17