

2025 HOUSE EDUCATION

HB 1516

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1516
2/12/2025

Relating to the requirement for an educational employee to be an observer of the board of a public school.

9:59 a.m. Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Conmy, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Heilman, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Marchall, Morton, Novak, Osowski

Discussion Topics:

- Teacher retention
- Student observers
- Teachers on the school board

10:01 a.m. Representative Foss introduced the bill and submitted testimony. #36916 #37364

10:12 a.m. Amy De Kok, Executive Director, ND School Board Association, testified in opposition and submitted testimony. #37307

Additional written testimony:

Tracy Foss, Science Teacher, Hatton Eielson School, submitted testimony in favor. #36930

Michael Linnell, Director of University Communications, Minot State University, submitted testimony in favor. #37126

Cody Mickelson, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #37158

Meagan Monreal, ND Resident, submitted testimony in favor. #37097

Matthew Montonye, President, West Fargo Education, submitted testimony in favor. #37012

Josh Nelson, Social Studies Teacher, Northwood Public Schools, submitted testimony in favor. #37204

Kristen Nelson, ND Resident, submitted testimony in opposition. #36508

10:28 a.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

Kristin Nelson

2/9/25

5409 20th Street South

Fargo, ND 58104

District 46

DO NOT PASS HB 1516

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee:

I am writing to you today to urge a **DO NOT PASS on HB 1516**. This bill is well intentioned, but unnecessary. School boards have ways teachers can observe and communicate directly with the board and contribute to meetings. Not sure what this bill would ultimately achieve that is not happening currently.

DO NOT PASS HB 1516.

Respectfully submitted:

Kristin Nelson (she/her)

Representative Austin Foss
Testimony in Support of HB 1516

Chairman Heinert, members of the education committee,

I am here today to introduce House Bill 1516, which would provide teachers with a formal voice as board observers on school boards. This bill is an essential step in fostering a more collaborative, respectful, and effective relationship between school boards and the educators who work directly with students every day.

Recent survey data from North Dakota United shows that teachers do not feel heard or respected by school boards. According to the survey, 56% of teachers feel that their opinions are not respected by their school boards, and 52% believe their experience is not valued. This disconnect creates frustration among educators and contributes to the larger issue of teacher dissatisfaction and retention.

The Teacher Retention Task Force specifically addressed this issue in Recommendation #3, which calls for schools to create a more supportive school culture and include employee satisfaction as a factor in strategic decision-making. HB 1516 directly aligns with this recommendation by ensuring that educators have a presence in school board meetings, providing valuable insight into the challenges and successes within classrooms. Also, by fostering open and honest dialogue between school boards and teachers, this bill empowers communities to address issues directly and create a stronger, more supportive work environment for educators. Local collaboration is key to ensuring our schools are places where teachers feel valued and supported.

Moreover, giving teachers a formal role as board observers is not an unprecedented concept. We already have faculty and staff representation on the State Board of Higher Education, and in the private sector, board observers are a common practice to ensure decision-makers receive firsthand insight from employees. The same logic should apply to our K-12 schools.

At its core, the primary mission of our education system is to serve students. Teachers are the ones providing this service every single day. School boards exist to make decisions in the best interest of students, and those decisions should be informed by the professionals who are in the classrooms with them. When school boards and teachers communicate openly and with mutual respect, we create stronger schools, retain high-quality educators, and, most importantly, improve student outcomes.

House Bill 1516 is a solution to bridge the gap between school boards and teachers. It ensures that educators have a seat at the table—not as voting members, but as informed voices that can provide perspective and insight that directly impact students. I urge you to support this bill and take an important step toward strengthening our education system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

North Dakota United 2023 Survey Excerpts

Q3: And do you think things in your school district are moving in the right direction, or do you think things are on the wrong track?

Right direction	31%
Wrong track	48
(VOL) Unsure	21

Q7: How big an issue is teacher retention?

Major issue	88%
Somewhat of an issue	11
Minor issue	1
No issue	0
Unsure	1

Q18: As an educator, do you feel your opinion is respected by each of the following:

C – Your School Board

Yes, A Lot	5%
Yes, Somewhat	29
No	56
Unsure	10

Q19: As an educator, do you feel your experience is respected by each of the following:

C – Your School Board

Yes, A Lot	7%
Yes, Somewhat	30
No	52
Unsure	11

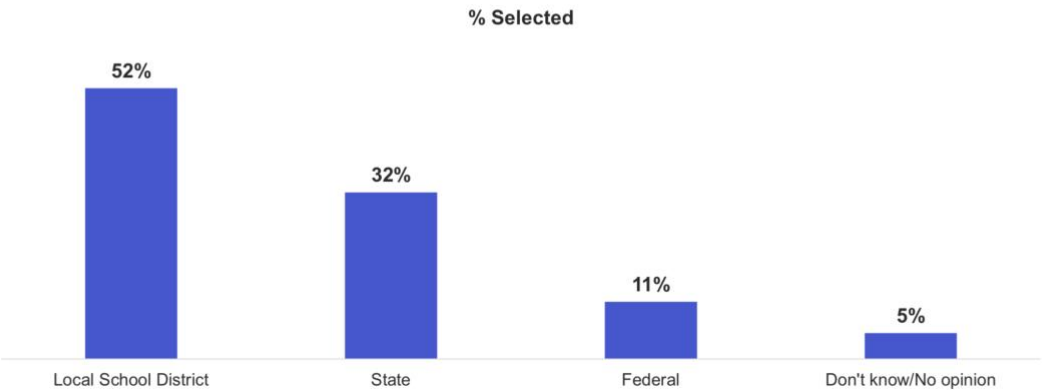
Q22: If asked by a current student, would you recommend/encourage them to enter the education profession?

Yes	10%
No	50
Depends	37
Unsure	3

Morning Consult National Teacher Survey Excerpt

More than half of those who agree that the government has a role in education accountability think that local school districts should have the most influence in these systems.

Which level of government (state, district, federal) should have the most influence on accountability systems in K-12 education? *(Among teachers who agree the gov't has a role to play in the accountability systems in K-12 education; N=841)*



Learning Policy Institute Teacher Shortage Information

State	Undercertified teachers	Percentage of schools with vacancies unfilled or reported as hard to fill
North Dakota	0.8%	61.5%
Iowa	0.04%	49.4%
Minnesota	1.6%	44.7%
Montana	4.5%	59.2%
South Dakota	2.7%	47.2%
Wisconsin	2.2%	43.1%
Wyoming	0.3%	56.7%
United States Average	3.7%	46.9%

Teacher Retention Task Force

RECOMMENDATION #1. PROVIDE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR EDUCATORS AND LEARNERS IN EVERY BUILDING

The Task Force recommends state agency leaders and education stakeholders collaborate to address system gaps, leverage opportunities and activate a continuum of support to create safe, supportive environments for educators and learners in every building as measured by a statewide system of student behavior metrics.

This recommendation aims to support a safe and supportive working environment for all North Dakota educators. The Task Force specifies measuring improvement in addressing system gaps, leveraging opportunities and activating continua of support by utilizing statewide data systems focused on student behavior. Positive school cultures and healthy learning environments have a significant impact on student outcomes and [educator retention](#). Strong school environments result in higher engagement and attendance for students and staff, reduced office referrals and decreased teacher [turnover](#). Safe and supportive learning environments may be measured through student metrics such as risky or unsafe behavior which are shown to be [reduced](#) within positive learning environments.

RECOMMENDATION #3. UNDERSTAND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

The Task Force recommends the state annually survey school employees to understand employee satisfaction. Further, the Task Force recommends school boards include employee satisfaction in driving their strategic goals.

This recommendation aims to increase awareness and planning to support employee satisfaction through data collection. Job satisfaction is influenced by factors which maintain or encourage people in their role. This recommendation supports data collection to inform planning and improvement of workplace satisfaction including [factors](#) such as compensation, school policies and relationships. This includes achievement, recognition and career advancement. By incorporating employee satisfaction data in strategic goal setting, schools and districts will identify key factors related to educator retention in plans for continuous improvement aimed at ensuring supportive school culture.

Tracy Foss
14909 14th St NE
Hatton, ND 58240
2/10/2015

Chairperson Heinert and Members of the Committee,

My name is Tracy Foss, and I am a Science Teacher at Hatton Eielson School. I am writing in support of House Bill 1516, which seeks to establish a school board observer position for teachers, allowing for greater teacher representation in the local decision-making processes.

Passing this bill will ensure teachers in all districts have the ability to communicate directly with school boards through a teacher representative, ensuring teacher perspectives are taken into account when making decisions. I have taught in three different rural North Dakota school districts. In each of those districts, teachers were permitted to watch a school board meeting, but were not allowed to offer input unless called upon. Passing this bill will ensure teachers have a formal voice in their school district as well as allow the teacher observer to add to the discussion at the time of the discussion.

Every decision made by a school board directly impacts teachers and, in turn, students. Yet, not all decisions fully take into account the practical implications for classroom instruction, student engagement, or overall school climate. Having a designated teacher observer ensures that the perspective of those working closest with students is included in discussions that shape our schools. Policies informed by direct classroom experience, are much more likely to be effective, which will improve teacher satisfaction and in turn will ultimately benefit students.

I urge you to support House Bill 1516 to ensure that teacher perspectives are not only heard but also valued in the governance of our schools. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Tracy Foss
Science Teacher
Hatton Eielson School
Hatton, ND

To Whom it may concern,

As President of the West Fargo Education Association, I urge you to pass HB 1516. As the current President of our union, I can state that there is a widening gap between educators/teachers, district administration, and school boards. I am currently writing this while I am sitting at our school board meeting. While I do have a “seat” so to speak at the school board meetings, as President I am delegated to back of the room in a non-speaking position unless called upon which is almost never. As I have done this for almost two years, I often notice that the information shared between district leaders and school boards don’t always paint the true picture of what teachers are dealing with on a daily basis. I believe that by passing this bill it would help create greater transparency and in turn help with teacher retention and improve the climate and wellness of a school district.

Please consider passing HB 1516

Thanks

Matt Montonye

President of the West Fargo Education Association

My name is Meagan Monreal, and I am currently a 6th grade teacher at Northwood Elementary School. I have dedicated over a decade of my life to the field of education, serving in roles as both a paraprofessional and a classroom teacher.

My unique journey in education, having worked as a paraprofessional before becoming a classroom teacher, has given me a comprehensive view of our school system. This diverse experience has reinforced my belief that educators' voices are crucial in decision-making processes that affect our schools. Teachers and support staff are indeed the backbone of education, and our perspective is invaluable when it comes to understanding how schools should be run and how resources should be allocated.

In my various roles at Northwood Elementary and in previous positions, I've witnessed numerous instances where input from teachers and paraprofessionals could have significantly improved board decisions. Our on-the-ground experience provides insights into the practical implications of policies and resource allocation that may not be immediately apparent to those outside the classroom.

It's worth noting that many educators, myself included, already attend school board meetings regularly. We are engaged, we are informed, and we are deeply invested in the success of our schools and students. By formalizing teacher representation on the school board, we can ensure that this valuable perspective is not just heard but also integrated into the decision-making process.

Moreover, having teachers on the school board sends a powerful message to the entire education community. It tells us that our expertise is valued, that our voices matter, and that we are important stakeholders in the governance of our schools. This inclusion can boost morale, increase staff retention, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for our students.

Educators bring a unique blend of practical classroom experience and educational expertise to the table. We understand the day-to-day realities of implementing policies, the challenges our students face, and the resources needed to support effective teaching and learning. This insight is crucial for making informed decisions about curriculum, resource allocation, and school policies.

In conclusion, I urge you to support the inclusion of teachers on our school board. This step will not only enhance the quality of decision-making but also strengthen the connection between the board and the classroom, ultimately benefiting our students, our schools, and our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Mrs. Meagan Monreal
6th grade teacher
Vice President of Northwood Teacher Association
Speech Coach

HB 1516
House Education Committee
Feb. 11, 2025
Michael Linnell, Minot State University
Minot, ND 58701
701-858-3065 | Michael.linnell@minotstateu.edu

Chair Heinert and members of the Committee,

My name is Michael Linnell, and I am the Director of University Communications at Minot State University. I also serve on the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) as the Staff Advisor, a non-voting member of the Board. I am writing in support of HB 1516 as an individual who has a position similar to what is proposed in HB 1516, and I believe it is valuable for educational professionals to have a formal voice on the respective school board. This testimony is not on behalf of the ND State Board of Higher Education.

The role of the Staff Advisor is beneficial for both the board I serve on and the employees within the North Dakota University System (NDUS) I represent. While I do not have a vote for formal positions, policy-making, or procedures, this position offers advice and insight to the board on behalf of all classified staff in the system. I solicit information and insight monthly from all 11 NDUS schools during State Staff Senate meetings and work with individuals on State Staff Senate's Executive Board to help better inform SBHE members of the day-to-day operations. The position also allows for communication to work both ways, informing State Staff Senate of changes and updates that come from SBHE meetings and the rationale behind such moves.

I believe this position helps develop a better relationship between staff members and the SBHE. As a non-voting member, it removes any conflict of interest that could arise with policy and procedural changes and helps align those changes with what is in the best interest of staff among the NDUS. I believe this representation is vital for both NDUS employees and the SBHE.

For these reasons, I support HB 1516 and encourage the committee to support a Do Pass recommendation on this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted:

Michael Linnell

Chairman Heinert and members of the Education Committee,

I am writing today to encourage you to give a DO PASS recommendation to HB 1516. I would like to say first and foremost that I know school board members have a great deal of knowledge to acquire and business to act upon at each meeting. I have been fortunate in my district to have a good working relationship with many board members.

HB 1516 provides great opportunity to each district in our state for education staff to learn about board leadership process and the culture of each school board.

The relationship between staff and school boards is often portrayed as strained or contentious. A reasonable solution to these depictions is the development of an understanding between the two groups, which is the foundation of this bill.

In my own district in Jamestown, I have seen how open dialogue among board members, teachers, and administrators has facilitated many positive and thoughtful changes that have impacted all staff and students. It has created ongoing conversations in which people respect the perspectives of others and lean on their input.

I believe this bill can provide the opportunity to better recruit and retain teachers, as well as create relationships and cultures that could accelerate the many positive movements in education.

Thank you,

Cody Mickelson
Jamestown, ND

2/11/2025

To Chairperson Heinert and the House Education Committee,

My name is Josh Nelson. I am in year 16 as a public-school teacher in Northwood, ND. As a resident of North Dakota Legislative District 20 I am writing this letter to show support for HB 1516 to allow a voice to teachers on a school board. This letter is of my own opinion and not necessarily the stance of my school district.

I urge the members of the committee to consider a due pass resolution on HB 1516 and encourage their peers on the floor to support the passage of the bill

I do feel the passing of HB 1516 would provide a positive link between local school boards and teachers across our state. With benefits such as.

1. **Providing the board with firsthand knowledge on education issues.** There are times I sit in a board room and do have input to give, but I am not allowed to participate in a meeting until our local associations time on the agenda is called upon to speak. Teachers work more directly with students and have a unique perspective than even administrators and can provide board members with valuable feedback or information they may not currently be accounting for.
2. **Better Communication between the teachers and the board members.** Having a teacher on the board who can actively engage in conversation not only allows the teachers to voice their concerns in a more direct way, but they also allow the staff more transparency in what is going on in the district. Transparency is a key element in a democracy, and HB 1516 provides a manner in which teachers will feel heard, and will be able to voice concerns directly to a board instead of relying on administrators or the current format of giving 5 minutes to the local association to speak, and not necessarily given an opportunity for a rebuttal.
3. **More informed decision making.** A teacher representative on the school board will provide the elected, voting board members with in-depth real-world knowledge. A non-voting Teacher, who is a member, will be able to give direct feedback in real time during the meeting on issues such as budget, policy, and educational strategies and the possible impacts to the district. I have collaborated with amazing and well-intentioned administrators and school boards in my career, but they cannot see what I and other teachers deal with daily and may not have their thumbs on the pulse of a school system the way a teacher does.

Thank you to the House Education Committee for considering the passage of HB 1516.

Respectfully,

Josh Nelson



NDSBA
NORTH DAKOTA SCHOOL
BOARDS ASSOCIATION

1224 West Owens Avenue
Bismarck ND 58501
1-800-932-8791 • (701)255-4127
www.ndsba.org

HB 1516
Testimony of Amy De Kok
House Education Committee
February 12, 2025

Chairman Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is Amy De Kok, and I serve as the executive director for the North Dakota School Boards Association. NDSBA represents all 168 public school districts and their governing boards. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to express strong opposition to HB 1516, which would mandate the appointment of an educational employee as an observer to public school boards. While the bill's intent may be to foster collaboration, it raises significant concerns regarding school board authority, governance, transparency, and accountability. Furthermore, it is entirely unnecessary, as existing practices already promote open communication between school boards and local education associations.

Lack of Necessity for This Bill

School boards across North Dakota already engage regularly with their local education associations and other employee representatives. Board meetings are open to the public, and school boards consistently invite and receive input from teachers and staff on issues impacting the district, students, and employees. Many school districts have established advisory committees or designated meeting times for direct communication with staff representatives, making this bill redundant.

Additionally, school districts have existing policies and a well-established chain of command procedure to address staff concerns and complaints. Teachers and other staff members have multiple avenues to raise issues through their direct supervisors, school administrators, and human resources before such concerns are elevated to the board level. These policies ensure that concerns are addressed in a structured and appropriate manner while maintaining professionalism and efficiency in district operations. The addition of a board observer is unnecessary, as these mechanisms already provide ample opportunity for staff voices to be heard and concerns to be resolved without compromising the governance structure of the board.

Additionally, there has been no expressed demand for this bill from the state's largest organization representing public school employees—North Dakota United. If this measure were a

necessary or widely supported policy, it would be reasonable to expect advocacy or endorsement from North Dakota United. Their silence speaks volumes, suggesting that existing practices already meet the needs of educators in terms of communication and representation before school boards.

Erosion of School Board Authority

HB 1516 undermines the role of the duly elected school board by inserting an unelected individual into its deliberative process. The school board serves the entire community, balancing the needs of students, parents, taxpayers, and employees. The presence of an observer who exclusively represents the interests of educational employees risks distorting this balance and interfering with the board's autonomy.

Inappropriate Access to Executive Session Discussions

While the bill states that the observer “may not participate in a meeting or part of a meeting regarding employment matters specifically related to the observer,” it is silent on the broader issue of executive sessions. School boards frequently enter executive session to discuss sensitive matters such as certain personnel decisions, contract negotiations, private student information and legal issues impacting the district. The presence of a representative who is directly appointed by the local education association could create conflicts of interest and compromise the confidentiality essential to these discussions.

Impact on Employment Matters Before the Board

School boards are responsible for making employment decisions, including hiring, discipline, and contract negotiations. The observer, as a current district employee and representative of the education association, would have an inherent conflict of interest. This arrangement could allow for undue influence in employment-related matters, particularly when decisions directly impact the observer’s colleagues and professional relationships. Furthermore, the bill provides no safeguards to prevent indirect participation in employment discussions that could affect fellow employees or the collective bargaining process.

Unelected Individual Not Answerable to the Public

Unlike elected school board members, who are accountable to voters, the proposed observer would be handpicked by the local education association and serve for a term without public oversight. This individual would be granted privileged access to board discussions without being subject to the electoral process. The fundamental principle of representative governance is that those who influence decision-making should be answerable to the people they serve. This bill circumvents that principle, giving a select group disproportionate influence over school board affairs.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to oppose HB 1516. It is unnecessary given the already open lines of communication between school boards and educational staff. It erodes the authority of duly

elected school board members, introduces conflicts of interest in employment matters, risks breaching confidentiality in executive sessions, and places decision-making influence in the hands of an unelected individual who is not accountable to the broader public. While collaboration between school staff and board members is important, this bill is not the appropriate mechanism to achieve that goal.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions from the committee.

25.0925.02003
Title.

Prepared by the Legislative Council
staff for Representative Foss
February 10, 2025

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly
of North Dakota

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO

HOUSE BILL NO. 1516

Introduced by

Representatives Foss, Sanford, Swiontek, Pyle, Novak, Richter

Senators Boschee, Axtman

- 1 A BILL for an Act to create and enact a new section to chapter 15.1-09 of the North Dakota
- 2 Century Code, relating to the requirement for an educational employee to be an observer of the
- 3 board of a public school.

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

- 5 **SECTION 1.** A new section to chapter 15.1-09 of the North Dakota Century Code is created
- 6 and enacted as follows:

7 School board - Observer.

- 8 1. The board of a school district must include one to two board observers who are
- 9 educational employees employed by the school district to represent educational
- 10 employees.
- 11 2. The education association in the school district shall provide the board of a school
- 12 district with three candidates from which the board of a school district shall appoint
- 13 one to two board observers.
- 14 3. A board observer:
- 15 a. Shall represent the interests of educational employees of the school district at
- 16 each meeting of the board of a school.
- 17 b. Must be appointed to a one-year term by the education association in the school
- 18 district by vote of the education association at a meeting held before the
- 19 beginning of each fiscal year.

Sixty-ninth
Legislative Assembly

- 1 c. May participate in a meeting of the board of a school district, except as otherwise
- 2 provided under this section, including participating in discussion to contribute the
- 3 perspectives of the educational employees.
- 4 d. Is not a voting board member.
- 5 e. May not be counted for purposes of a quorum under section 15.1-09-29.
- 6 f. May not participate in a meeting or part of a meeting regarding employment
- 7 matters specifically related to the observer.
- 8 f.g. Shall provide a summary to the education association of each meeting, including
- 9 details that are relevant to educational employees.

2025 HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE MINUTES

Education Committee Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

HB 1516
2/17/2025

Relating to the requirement for an educational employee to be an observer of the board of a public school.

9:25 a.m. Chairman Heinert called the hearing to order.

Members Present: Chairman Heinert, Vice Chairman Schreiber- Beck, Representatives, Hager, Hatlestad, Hauck, Jonas, Longmuir, Maki, Morton, Osowski

Discussion Topics:

- Committee Action

9:26 a.m. Representative Hatlestad moved a Do Not Pass.

9:26 a.m. Representative Jonas seconded the motion.

Representatives	Vote
Representative Pat D. Heinert	Y
Representative Cynthia Schreiber-Beck	Y
Representative Liz Conmy	A
Representative LaurieBeth Hager	Y
Representative Patrick R. Hatlestad	Y
Representative Dori Hauck	Y
Representative Matthew Heilman	A
Representative Jim Jonas	Y
Representative Donald W. Longmuir	Y
Representative Roger A. Maki	N
Representative Andrew Marschall	A
Representative Desiree Morton	N
Representative Anna S. Novak	A
Representative Doug Osowski	N

Motion Carried: 7-3-4

Bill Carrier: Representative Hatlestad

9:27 a.m. Chairman Heinert closed the hearing.

Saydee Wahl for Leah Kuball, Committee Clerk

REPORT OF STANDING COMMITTEE
HB 1516 ([25.0925.02000](#))

Education Committee (Rep. Heinert, Chairman) recommends **DO NOT PASS** (7 YEAS, 3 NAYS, 4 ABSENT OR EXCUSED AND NOT VOTING). HB 1516 was placed on the Eleventh order on the calendar.