

2026 NDSBA ANNUAL REPORT

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the 2026 North Dakota School Boards Association Annual Convention!

This convention brings together school board members and education leaders from across North Dakota. We represent districts of different sizes and communities with different challenges, but we share a common responsibility: providing strong leadership for our schools and opportunities for our students.

Over the next few days, take the opportunity to step away from the regular board agenda and look at the bigger picture. Learn from our presenters, ask questions, visit with our vendors, and most importantly, talk with fellow board members. Often, the best idea we take home comes from a conversation with someone facing the same challenge in another district.

This year, NDSBA held regional meetings across the state for the first time in many years. These meetings allowed us to come to you, listen to what is happening in your districts, and better understand the issues facing boards throughout North Dakota. That communication is especially important as we enter a legislative year.

We know funding will be tight. Districts continue to face increasing costs, workforce challenges, facility needs, transportation expenses, and growing expectations. Legislators will also be balancing many priorities with limited resources. NDSBA will advocate for North Dakota's public schools, but our strongest voice is you—the locally elected board members who know your students, staff, taxpayers, and communities. Stay informed, communicate with your legislators, and tell the story of your local school.

Serving on a school board is a unique responsibility. We balance budgets, establish policy, support our superintendents, listen to our communities, and make decisions that can affect our districts for years. Amid all of those responsibilities, we cannot lose sight of why we are here: students.

Thirty years from now, today's kindergarten students probably won't remember that a bus route took an extra five minutes or that a sports co-op debated team colors. They will remember the teacher who believed in them, the coach who pushed them, the principal who knew their name, and the school that gave them an opportunity to succeed.

Our job as board members is to create an environment where those people—and those students—can succeed. We do that through good policy, responsible budgeting, strong leadership, and keeping students at the center of our decisions.

On behalf of the NDSBA Board of Directors and our outstanding staff, welcome to the 2026 Annual Convention. Thank you for the time you give to your schools and communities and for the leadership you provide to public education across North Dakota.

Have a great convention!

Nathan Berseth, NDSBA Board President

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

This past year has been an exciting and busy one for NDSBA. As I look back on 2026, I am especially proud of the ways our Association has continued to grow, strengthen our services, and respond to the changing needs of North Dakota's school boards and public schools.

One of our largest undertakings has been the launch of the StudentsFirst Governance Program. NDSBA redesigned the former Be Legendary program to create a practical, North Dakota-focused approach to effective school board governance. Our first cohort launched this fall with 12 school districts. We have built a

network of North Dakota coaches, incorporated new governance tools and technology, and developed a program focused on helping boards and superintendents establish clear student-focused goals and use those goals to guide their work to move the needle for students in their districts.

We also launched NDSBA's new Evaluator Service, providing districts with practical online tools for superintendent and business manager evaluations and school board self-assessments. This is another example of our ongoing effort to develop resources that make the important work of school boards more manageable and effective.

NDSBA's legal and policy services have also continued to grow. Through Legal Direct, policy services, and our ongoing legal education efforts, we are helping districts navigate increasingly complex issues involving personnel, special education, open records, governance, student matters, and many other areas of school law.

I have also appreciated the opportunity to travel across North Dakota for our regional meetings, where we have brought together board members, superintendents, legislators, state leaders, and community partners. Those conversations have been invaluable as we prepare for the 2027 Legislative Session and continue advocating for strong public schools and local school boards.

That advocacy also includes NDSBA's active participation in and support of North Dakotans for Public Schools (ND4PS). Through this coalition, NDSBA is working alongside other education organizations and partners, as well as parents and community leaders, to strengthen the collective voice supporting North Dakota's public schools and to help ensure that policymakers and the public understand the important role public education plays in communities across our state.

I am also very excited about the outstanding programming planned for this year's Annual Convention and related events. We have worked to provide timely, practical, and engaging sessions that address the issues school boards and district leadership teams are facing today. I strongly encourage board members, superintendents, business managers, and other members of your leadership teams to take full advantage of these valuable professional development opportunities. Just as importantly, the Convention provides a tremendous opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the state, exchange ideas, learn from one another, and build relationships that strengthen the work we all do.

I am grateful for the trust our members place in NDSBA and for the opportunity to work alongside school board members and education leaders across North Dakota. Our focus remains on providing practical support, strong advocacy, meaningful professional development, and the resources local boards need to serve their students and communities well.

Amy De Kok, NDSBA Executive Director

NDUC GROUP ACCOUNT

The North Dakota Unemployment Compensation (NDUC) Group Account is a service NDSBA offers to its members to assist with unemployment claims. Established under North Dakota law, the program allows districts to pool their deposits for the purpose of paying claims. School districts that belong to the NDUC Group Account deposit a percentage of their annual payroll with the Group Account. Money is on deposit with NDSBA but belongs to the districts.

Member benefits include monitoring unemployment claims as they are filed, payment of claims from the member district's required reserve, and reimbursement spread over a number of quarters to give districts an opportunity to include it in their annual budget.

All NDSBA members are eligible to participate in this program. A minimal annual administrative fee is charged to cover expenses. Contact NDSBA if you would like more information.

Julie Steidler, Operations and Policy Specialist

NDSBA POLICY SERVICES

NDSBA's Policy Services continues to be one of the Association's most widely used member services, supporting North Dakota school districts, special education units, and CTE units with practical, legally reviewed policy resources.

During 2026, NDSBA continued to strengthen its policy offerings and improve member access to policy resources. NDSBA's policy catalog now includes more than 600 sample policies, regulations, exhibits, and related documents, all designed to help boards maintain current, legally compliant, and workable policy manuals. Members also continue to receive Quarterly Policy Updates that identify changes in state and federal law, explain their impact, and provide recommended policy revisions where appropriate.

NDSBA continues to offer several levels of Policy Services to meet the varying needs of members:

- **Required Membership** provides access to legally required and accreditation-related policies, Quarterly Policy Updates, legal guidance, and a limited number of complimentary policy templates each year.
- **Total Template Membership** provides access to NDSBA's full policy catalog and supporting materials, including resources tailored for multidistrict special education units.
- **Webhosted / Maintenance Membership** provides additional support by allowing NDSBA to host and maintain board-approved policy manuals in a searchable online format, apply approved updates, and assist with publication and board-platform integration.

NDSBA also continues to provide its Policy Manual Review Service for members seeking a comprehensive review of an existing policy manual. These projects include a detailed analysis of current policies, recommendations to adopt, amend, or rescind policies, organized review materials, sample motions, and implementation guidance. This service has become an important resource for boards seeking to modernize older manuals or bring them into alignment with current law and NDSBA templates.

Throughout the year, NDSBA has also continued to revise individual policy templates in response to changes in law, emerging legal issues, and member needs. This work includes both legally required revisions and broader updates intended to make policy language more practical and useful for local boards and administrators.

The Association's updated member portal has also made it easier for members to access Policy Services materials and locate current templates and resources.

Looking ahead, NDSBA will continue expanding and refining its policy resources, monitoring legal and regulatory developments, and helping members maintain policy manuals that are current, legally sound, and responsive to the needs of their local schools and communities.

Amy De Kok, NDSBA Executive Director

BUSINESS MANAGER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The North Dakota School Business Manager Certification Program is administered by NDSBA and the ND Association of School Business Managers. It was established in 2013, thanks to a grant from the ND Legislature. The program provides business managers with statutory and regulatory requirements, professional development, as well as guidelines to successfully complete their daily duties.

Students have five years to complete 20 courses and nine hours of professional development to attain program certification. Classes are a combination of online and in-person instruction. Students can test out of two classes. Graduates of the program are honored with a certificate of completion at a ceremony at the NDSBA Annual Convention.

Please contact Patty VerDouw at 800-932-8791 or at patty.verdouw@ndsba.org if interested in the certification program.

Patty VerDouw, Business and Policy Specialist

LEGAL SERVICES PROGRAM

The NDSBA Legal Services Program is an integral part of membership in NDSBA. School board members, superintendents, and business managers of member school districts are encouraged to utilize this service to obtain general legal information and resources on the numerous legal issues affecting their districts. NDSBA General Counsel KrisAnn Norby-Jahner and NDSBA Executive Director Amy De Kok provide general information and resources to member districts and their representatives about open meetings and open records, personnel matters, board procedure, negotiations, student discipline, staff evaluations, federal and state legal requirements applicable to schools, and when legal counsel should be hired. No separate fee is charged to member school districts for this service.

No attorney-client relationship is intended or created between NDSBA General Counsel and member districts or their representatives through the Legal Services Program. The Legal Services Program does **NOT** include the following:

- Direct legal advice, guidance, opinion or representation regarding a specific situation or set of circumstances
- Legal representation at the local level (board meetings, administrative hearings, or in court)
- Negotiation of contracts or negotiated agreements
- Drafting of legal documents
- Legal representation in litigation or administrative proceedings

Amy De Kok, NDSBA Executive Director and KrisAnn Norby-Jahner, NDSBA General Counsel

NDSBA LEGAL DIRECT

NDSBA General Counsel, KrisAnn Norby-Jahner, and NDSBA Executive Director, Amy De Kok, may be retained to assist member school districts on a fee-for-services basis. There is a demand for direct, customized legal services for public school districts that is not being fully met by our Legal Affiliates despite their best efforts. In addition, school districts are hesitant to retain private counsel even when recommended to do so due to the cost associated with private legal services. For these reasons, our members benefit greatly by having an option for discounted legal services available to them. NDSBA is in a unique position to provide this service to our members at below-market rates through our fee-based program, NDSBA Legal Direct. NDSBA Legal Direct is meant to supplement, not supplant, the services provided to our members by our Legal Affiliates.

The following fee-based legal services may be provided through NDSBA Legal Direct:

- **General legal counsel and advice:** NDSBA attorneys may provide direct legal advice and counseling to our member districts on the day-to-day legal issues and situations that arise in school operations.
- **Contract review:** NDSBA attorneys may be retained to draft, review and/or modify contracts member districts enter with vendors or other third-party service providers.
- **Negotiated Agreement review:** NDSBA attorneys may be retained to review district Negotiated Agreements. At a member district's request staff will provide a written analysis

of the Negotiated Agreement.

- **Customized policy drafting:** NDSBA attorneys may assist member districts to customize school board policies and related regulations to tailor them to districts' needs.
- **Nonrenewal hearings:** NDSBA attorneys may counsel and assist member districts through the nonrenewal process (performance and RIF), including representation at due process hearings.
- **Customized training:** NDSBA attorneys is able to provide training and professional development to school boards and/or their staff through specially designed seminars and in-service training in areas such as student rights and discipline, personnel issues, anti-bullying programs, special education, weapons and threat assessment, discrimination and harassment prevention, complaint handling, equal opportunity, ADA, FMLA, FLSA, FERPA and student records, open records and meetings, staff evaluations, and similar law-related topics.

At this time, NDSBA Legal Direct expressly excludes the following services: litigation matters; discharge for cause hearings; matters that may be covered by insurance (NDIRF) or assigned to insurance counsel; matters where another member school district is adverse to the district requesting assistance; matters where the school district may be adverse to the interests of NDSBA; and matters where the member district is already represented by legal counsel on the matter.

Services are provided in exchange for a below-market hourly rate or on a flat-fee basis.

Amy De Kok, NDSBA Executive Director, and KrisAnn Norby-Jahner, NDSBA General Counsel

NDSBA LEGAL SERVICES AFFILIATION

As an extension of the NDSBA Legal Services Program, a Legal Services Affiliation is available to attorneys who provide support and legal services to public school boards in North Dakota. Purposes of the Affiliation are to:

- Promote a professional and mutually beneficial relationship between school attorneys and school boards of the state of North Dakota
- Disseminate legal information and analysis to members and promote the exchange of legal information and analysis among members
- Provide a state forum on legal issues faced by school attorneys incident to their primary function of providing legal counsel, advice, and representation to school boards
- Provide in-service training to its members.

To accomplish these objectives, members of the Legal Services Affiliation, as part of their dues, are provided with membership in the National Council of School Attorneys and/or the National School Attorneys Association. Members also receive the NDSBA *Bulletin* and a reduced registration fee for the annual School Law Seminar, held in conjunction with the NDSBA Annual Convention.

If your school district attorney is not a member of the NDSBA Legal Services Affiliation, please encourage them to participate. Membership information is available under Legal Services on the NDSBA webpage at www.ndsba.org.

Amy De Kok, NDSBA Executive Director, and KrisAnn Norby-Jahner, NDSBA General Counsel

ND ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS MANAGERS

The North Dakota Association of School Business Managers (NDASBM) was founded in 1981 and is an affiliate organization of the North Dakota School Boards Association. The goal of NDASBM is to provide training, networking, and professional growth opportunities for business managers of public school districts, special education cooperatives, and vocational/technical education centers.

NDASBM is represented by eight regions throughout North Dakota. Present directors are:

Region I:	Brant Hebert – McKenzie County
Region II:	Dawn Hauck - Rugby
Region III:	Shauna Schneider - Langdon
Region IV:	Roxanne Phipps - Hatton Eielson
Region V:	Kendra Dockter - Richland
Region VI:	Kristi Grounds - Jamestown
Region VII:	Dr. Darin Scherr - Bismarck
Region VIII:	Rhonda Zastoupil – Killdeer

The NDASBM Annual Convention is held in conjunction with the North Dakota School Boards Association Annual Convention. The professional development event provides business managers with an opportunity to stay informed of legislative and regulatory changes, network with other business managers, and receive industry updates.

The NDASBM Spring Workshop was held at the Bismarck Career Academy this past April. The workshop held sessions on the Property & Liability Insurance, ND Workforce Safety & Insurance, WebGrant Claims, Gap Funding, Budgeting, Infinite Campus, and Business Manager Burnout. The workshop ended with a NDASBM Business Meeting where Region II, IV and VI directors were elected.

In addition to the Annual Convention and Spring Workshop, members also attended various NDSBA hosted webinars throughout the year.

Directors met for the annual meeting in July for board reorganization and to plan the NDASBM Fall Convention.

The board will meet during the annual convention to begin planning next year's Spring Workshop.

Rhonda Zastoupil, NDASBM President