

## SOUTHWEST REGIONAL MEETING: Facing Challenges, Seeking Resources

By Marci Narum, NDSBA Communications & Marketing Manager

As students and teachers gear up to go back to school in a couple of weeks, school leaders have an assignment for North Dakota lawmakers: *help us get the resources we need.*

That general theme surfaced at the NDSBA Southwest Regional Meeting in Dickinson last month. Board members, superintendents, and business managers from 13 school districts attended the July 16 meeting, along with county commissioners and state lawmakers.

Their concerns include teacher pay and benefits; but beyond that, recruiting (and *keeping*) teachers, staff, and bus drivers has become more difficult because of other factors as well.

"I honestly don't think wages are the biggest reason we're losing

teachers," said Dr. Marcus Letwon, Dickinson Schools Superintendent. "When we have informal conversations with our staff, student behavior is the number one issue."

Mandan Superintendent Dr. Carly Retterath said grants, programs, and services are available to help students, but many families lack the wraparound support needed to access them.



Dr. Carly Retterath,  
Mandan School  
Superintendent

"We have resources, but our challenge is helping people access them effectively," Retterath said. "Schools are natural connectors because we reach so many families, but we can't always provide the hands-on support needed to turn



those connections into action."

As schools work to bridge the gap between services and families who need them, leaders say they also need the funding necessary to support students daily.

"If we're going to provide all these supports for kids, then we need to be able to fund that for these teachers and give them the resources available," said West River Student Services Special Education Director Troy Knudsvig. "Teachers have become a safe place for students, but there's a lot of needs that come with making school a safe place."

District 37 Senator Dean Rummel of Dickinson has some ideas that could help. He's working on two pieces of legislation, including a tax reform bill that will address challenges school districts face in the wake of the property tax reform bill passed during the 2025 session – which included a 3% cap on annual increases in local property tax budgets.

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NDSBA Executive Director Amy De Kok moderates a panel discussion with local legislators. Pictured left to right: Rep. Keith Kempenich, Rep. Dori Hauck, Sen. Dean Rummel, and Sen. Don Schaible.

## SOUTHWEST REGIONAL MEETING

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"It's a discussion that we need to have," Rummel said. "If we're going to keep 3%, Let's give you the latitude to spend it where you need it. If you need it in building repair, to put a boiler in place, you should be able to do that and not be limited to 10 or 20 mills, whatever your voters allow you to do. Is that a good idea? That's something I would like to hear about (from school districts)."



Sen. Dean Rummel,  
District 37

The Southwest Regional Meeting included a panel discussion with Rummel and fellow Senator Don Schaible; and Representatives Dori Hauck and Keith Kempenich. Hauck said she wants to ease the burden of reports educators are required to submit to the state.

"I've asked several teachers and administrators to give me a list of all the reports that we require as legislators. When I see the list of reports that are currently required, I wonder if we're even using all the data. So, if you see reports that are redundant and not be helpful at the state level, please let me know," Hauck said. "Maybe we can eliminate some of those."

Hauck said she's also in favor of eliminating the U.S. Department of Education, but she wants to hear how school districts would be impacted.

NDSBA Executive Director Amy De Kok said hearing from member districts is what these regional meetings is all about.

"We know that districts are facing some real challenges, but we also know there are many good things happening every day," De Kok said. "And we need to do a better job of sharing stories from our districts, what our students are doing, what our families are facing, and how school board members and our communities are dealing with those challenges as well."

## NDSBA KICKS OFF StudentsFirst Launch Institute

Amy De Kok, NDSBA Executive Director

NDSBA is excited to announce the kickoff of its Launch Institute for school districts participating in the StudentsFirst Governance Program.



StudentsFirst Governance is a certification program designed to help school boards and district leaders strengthen governance practices and align efforts focused on positive outcomes for all students. Through the Launch Institute experience, district leadership teams will engage in guided learning, collaboration, and planning to support long-term improvement and student achievement.

NDSBA looks forward to partnering with districts as they begin this important work. If your district is interested in joining an upcoming Launch Institute or learning more about the StudentsFirst Governance Program, contact Amy De Kok at [Amy.DeKok@ndsba.org](mailto:Amy.DeKok@ndsba.org).

### STUDENTSFIRST LAUNCH INSTITUTE DATES:

- Sept. 16:** National Energy Center for Excellence, Bismarck • 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- Sept. 22:** Bismarck Public Schools Career Academy, Bismarck • 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- Sept. 24:** Location TBD, Dickinson  
8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.
- Oct. 1:** Magic City Discovery Center, Minot  
8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

### UPCOMING NDSBA REGIONAL MEETINGS:

#### NW REGIONAL MEETING (NEW DATE AND TIME!)

Aug. 27 • 2:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

MHA Interpretive Center in New Town

#### NE REGIONAL MEETING

Sept. 10 • 3:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Location TBD



NORTHWEST  
REGIONAL  
MEETING

## Required Training for New Board Members

All newly elected school board members are required by state law to attend the **New Member Learning to Lead Workshop** on Thursday, Oct. 8, 8 a.m. – 2:45 p.m., during the annual convention at the Bismarck Event Center. The workshop is designed to provide the foundational knowledge and tools needed to be an effective board member. To register, contact your district business manager.