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North Dakota State Board of Higher Education

Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2026
Action Items

The State Board of Higher Education met on September 24, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. CT., at the Minot State University Student Center Conference Room, 500 University Ave. W., Minot, ND 58707, Minot State University Campus.

Roll Call

SBHE Members

☒ Mr. Kevin Black, Chair
☒ Mr. DJ Campbell, Vice Chair
☒ Mr. Kelby Azure
☒ Mr. Curtis Biller
☒ Ms. Michelle Kommer
☒ Mr. Tim Mihalick
☒ Mr. Pat Sogard
☒ Dr. Josh Deere
☒ Dr. Crystal Alberts, Faculty Advisor
☒ Ms. Anna Kinney, Staff Advisor

Institutions

BSC: President Kalk, Ms. Alicia Uhde, **DCB:** Dean Gorder, **DSU:** President Molander, **LRSC:** President Simone, **MaSU:** President Van Horn, **MiSU:** President Shirley, Ms. Sydney Yale, **NDSCS:** Interim President Karch**,** Mr. Keith Johnson, **NDSU:** President Stewart, Mr. Jace Beehler, **UND:** President Armacost, **VCSU:** Interim President Burgad, **WSC:** President Hirning, Mr. Hercules Cummings.

System Office/Guests

NDUS: Commissioner Sanford, Ms. Bethany Kadrmas, DC Meredith Larson, DC Lisa Johnson, DC Karla Stewart, Ms. Christina Pieske, Mr. Chris Pieske, Ms. Jamie Wilke, Mr. Dustin Walcker, Mr. Eric Jensen, Dr. Billie Jo Lorius, Mr. Cory Wigdahl, Ms. Edynn Glatt, Dr. Jennifer Weber, Ms. Sharon Schwartzbauer, Ms. Claire Gunwall, **CTS:** DC Corey Quirk, **Assistant Attorney General:** Mr. Shaun McNamara.

Call to Order

1. # Agenda
   Sogard moved, Mihalick seconded to approve the agenda, as presented.
   Motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Campus Report Out

2. Minot State University

President Shirley presented Minot State University's recent achievements and enrollment priorities, including two newly launched programs, established strengths in helping fields, record foundation fundraising, healthcare expansion, workforce-aligned programs, and efforts to reverse graduate enrollment declines.

NDUS Leadership Award

3. Alicia Uhde - BSC
4. Deb Smith – NDSCS
5. Denver Tolliver – NDSU

   DC Meredith Larson presented the first North Dakota University System Leadership Awards, recognizing Deb Smith, Denver Tolliver, and Alicia Uhde for leadership, innovation, collaboration, talent development, and institutional impact.

Because of audio issues affecting online participation, Chair Black moved to item 18 before returning to the regular agenda.

 # Board Business

6. Update on UND/US Dept. of Education

   Executive Session – Move to enter Executive Session to (1) engage in attorney consultation regarding the recently announced federal government investigation into the University of North Dakota, and (2) limit the executive session to voting board members, nonvoting advisers, Commissioner, UND President, UND Vice President for Research and Economic Development, selected NDUS Office Staff, and board and UND counsel. The legal authority for closing this portion of the meeting is North Dakota Century Code Section 44-04-19.1 and 44-04-19.2

   Campbell moved, Biller seconded to
   engage in attorney consultation regarding the recently announced federal government investigation into the University of North Dakota, and (2) limit the executive session to voting board members, nonvoting advisers, Commissioner, UND President, UND Vice President for Research and Economic Development, selected NDUS Office Staff, and board and UND counsel. The legal authority for closing this portion of the meeting is North Dakota Century Code Section 44-04-19.1 and 44-04-19.2

   Azure, Biller, Campbell, Deere, Kommer, Mihalick, Sogard and Black voted yes. Motion passed, 8-0.

   Executive Session began at 11:00 a.m., CT.

SBHE Members

☒ Mr. Kevin Black, Chair
☒ Mr. DJ Campbell, Vice Chair
☒ Mr. Kelby Azure
☒ Mr. Curtis Biller
☒ Ms. Michelle Kommer
☒ Mr. Tim Mihalick
☒ Mr. Pat Sogard
☒ Dr. Josh Deere
☒ Dr. Crystal Alberts, Faculty Advisor
☒ Ms. Anna Kinney, Staff Advisor

Others present: Commissioner Sanford, DC Meredith Larson, Mr. Chris Pieske, Ms. Christina Pieske, DC Karla Stewart, President Armacost, Ms. Nancy Yon, Mr. Shaun McNamara, Ms. Meloney Linder Mecklenberg, Dr. Scott Snyder.

Executive Session adjourned at 11:54 a.m., CT.

Open Session reconvened at 11:56 a.m., CT. with no action taken.

7. CLA Draft Report

Executive Session - Move to enter Executive Session to (1) discuss the draft compliance investigation report regarding DSU and any recommendations, and (2) limit the executive session to voting board members, nonvoting advisers, Commissioner, selected NDUS Office Staff, board counsel, and representatives from CLA. The legal authority for closing this portion of the meeting is North Dakota Century Code Section 15-10-44.3 and 44-04-19.2

Campbell moved, Biller seconded to discuss the draft compliance investigation report regarding DSU and any recommendations, and (2) limit the executive session to voting board members, nonvoting advisers, Commissioner, selected NDUS Office Staff, board counsel, and representatives from CLA. The legal authority for closing this portion of the meeting is North Dakota Century Code Section 15-10-44.3 and 44-04-19.2

Executive Session began at 12:02 p.m., CT.

SBHE Members

☒ Mr. Kevin Black, Chair
☒ Mr. DJ Campbell, Vice Chair
☒ Mr. Kelby Azure
☒ Mr. Curtis Biller
☒ Ms. Michelle Kommer
☒ Mr. Tim Mihalick
☒ Mr. Pat Sogard
☒ Dr. Josh Deere
☒ Dr. Crystal Alberts, Faculty Advisor
☒ Ms. Anna Kinney, Staff Advisor

Others Present: Commissioner Sanford, DC Meredith Larson, DC Karla Stewart, Mr. Shaun McNamara, Mr. Chris Pieske, Ms. Christina Pieske, Ms. Folashade Abiola-Banjac, Mr. Cory Wigdahl.

Executive Session adjourned at 1:32 p.m., CT.

Returned to Open Session at 1:55 p.m., CT. with no action taken.

Chair Black stated that the CLA Draft Report would be finalized and made available to the public shortly.

 # Board Consent (8-17)

8. August Meeting Minutes

9. 2027 All Meeting Schedule

Budget and Finance Committee

10. Williston State College
    a. Food Contract Rate Change Academic Year 2026-27

11. NDSCS
    a. 21-23 Tier III Request

12. 2027-29 Biennial Budget Operating Subsequent Requests

SBHE Policies

1st read, waive 2nd read

13. Policy 413 Mathematics and English Course Placement
14. Policy 470 State Authorization
15. Policy 502 Enrollment Integrity and Identity Compromise
16. Policy 510 Rights of Students Called to Active Military Service
17. Policy 812 Legal Representation

Sogard moved, Kommer seconded to approve the consent agenda, as presented.
Motion passed, 8-0.

 # Board Business (cont.)

18. LRSC President Emeritus – President Simone
    a. Dr. Sharon Etemad
       President Simone requested president emeritus status for Dr. Sharon Etemad, who served LRSC for 25 years, including as president from 1999 until retiring in 2008.

       Mihalick moved, Biller seconded to approve President Simone's request to grand Dr. Sharon Etemad president emeritus status.
       Motion passed, 8-0.

19. VCSU
    a. Updated Mission Statement
       Interim President Burgad explained that Valley City State University updated its strategic plan and mission through a process involving approximately 20 faculty, staff, and students, followed by broader engagement with faculty, staff, and students.

       Mihalick moved, Campbell seconded to approve VCSU's updated mission statement, as presented by Interim President Burgad.
       Motion passed, 8-0.

SBHE Policies

1st read

20. Policy 302.2 Audit Committee and Policy 311 Public Records
    DC Meredith Larson described renaming the Audit Committee as the Risk Management Committee and expanding its focus to enterprise risk management, compliance, and

internal audit. The changes are intended to support proactive oversight of litigation, regulatory matters, athletic compliance, emerging technology, and other risks.

21. Policy 306 Compliance Office Charter
    Mr. Chris Pieske presented amendments to the compliance charter, including updated committee naming and reporting structure and greater discretion to investigate anonymous complaints. He explained that every report is reviewed and documented in a case-management system, including decisions to refer, investigate, retain an outside investigator, or decline investigation. Kommer brought up concerns about anonymous complaints being weaponizing. After much discussion, it was decided that second read of Policy 306 would not be put on consent agenda next month.

    Sogard moved, Mihalick seconded to approve first read of the amendments of Policy 306, as presented by Mr. Pieske.
    Motion passed, 8-0.

22. Policy 306.2 Internal Audit Charter
    Mr. Cory Wigdahl presented amendments aligning the internal audit charter with the Risk Management Committee and the Institute of Internal Auditors Global Standards. Institutions with their own auditors would conduct system-wide audit work at their campuses, while the NDUS internal audit function would cover the remaining institutions, the System Office, and Core Technology Services.

    Campbell moved, Biller seconded to approve the change in Policy 306.2, as presented by Mr. Wigdahl.
    Motion passed, 8-0.

    2nd read
23. Policy 605.1 Academic Appointments
    DC Lisa Johnson presented second-read amendments to Policy 605.1. Tenured administrators could be exempt from post-tenure review while more than 50% of their responsibilities are administrative. Possible outcomes of an unfavorable review were clarified to include discipline, formal sanction, transition to a non-tenured role, or written notice of intent to terminate.

    Biller moved, Mihalick seconded to approve 2nd read of Policy 605.1, as presented by DC Johnson.
    Motion passed, 8-0.

Informational

24. Major IT Project Oversight Q2 Report
    Chair Black explained that DC Corey Quirk was not available to attend the meeting, and that any questions on this report should be directed to DC Quirk.

Representative Reports/Updates/Discussions

25. Staff Senate

Kinney reported that Staff Senate met with Commissioner Sanford and DC Larson to discuss the strategic playbook and gather feedback. Staff expressed appreciation for being included early, particularly because they understand operational impacts of resource sharing and shared services. Staff priorities for the next biennium include compensation and benefits, professional development, equitable support across institutions, facilities, infrastructure, and ERP modernization.

26. CCF
    Alberts reported that the Council of College Faculties discussed low-completion programs and provided approximately 51 pages of feedback on the agency report and proposed strategic playbook. She and faculty appreciate faculty participation in future decisions, especially academic-program and course-delivery decisions.

27. NDSA
    Azure reported that NDSA approved a resolution supporting withdrawal from the United States Student Association because delegates believed their time would be more useful preparing for the legislative session. NDSA tabled a proposed president's council charter until October to improve communication among student-body presidents and legislative-session delegates.

SBHE Committee Reports/Updates/Discussions

28. SBHE Academic and Student Affairs Committee
    a. Low Completion Programs
        i. Policy 422 - Review of Low-Completion Programs
        DC Johnson explained that the 2026 review identified 34 low-completion programs from approximately 2,000 data rows, but the list is informational and does not itself schedule program terminations.

29. SBHE Budget and Finance Committee
    Campbell reported that what was discussed at Budget and Finance Committee in September is on the consent agenda.

30. SBHE Audit Committee
    a. Approved FY27 Chief Audit Executive Salary
    b. Approved FY27 NDUS Internal Audit Plan
    Sogard reported that the Chief Audit Executive salary was discussed and approved. Both the internal audit plans and Q4 internal audit updates for both UND and NDSU were reported on in September's Audit meeting.

31. SBHE Governance Committee
    Kommer had nothing to report due to Governance Committee being cancelled in September.

Biller reported that EPSCoR is holding their annual conference in Minot on October 10, 2026 and invited everyone to attend.

Chair Report

32. Updates from Chair Black
    Black gave a brief update on the legislative interim committee meetings at LRSC and UND. He expressed his appreciation to Presidents Simone and Armacost for hosting. The committee voted on dual credit, recommend to the funding formula committee to come up with a single rate for subsidized dual credits.

Commissioner Report

33. Joint Boards Meeting Reminder - September 29th
    Chair Black announced that the Joint Boards meeting will take place on September 29th at the Capitol in Bismarck. He encouraged all board members to attend in person if possible.

34. Fall Enrollment Census
    Commissioner Sanford reported that fall 2026 system enrollment was essentially flat after five years of growth, while the board reviewed headcount, FTE, dual-credit, residency, and strategic-goal data to provide context for the results.

35. Updates from Commissioner Sanford
    a. **#** SBHE Strategic Plan - Commissioner Recommendation for Pillar One, Operating Model
    Commissioner Sanford and DC Larson presented a coordinated-network recommendation focused on optimizing the existing NDUS without closing campuses, merging institutions, or changing accreditation. Over 15 months, the work examined governance, the distribution of authority, organizational practices, comparable systems, higher-education trends, and stakeholder tensions. Pillar One objectives are to clarify roles and decision rights, establish an institutional and shared-services model, build shared capacity where performance improves, align the funding formula with strategy, connect resource allocation to statewide priorities, and strengthen coordination with state partners. After the board reviewed four alternatives, it was agreed upon that the coordinated network would be best as it resolves seven of ten identified barriers.

    Kommer moved, Campbell seconded to endorse optimization through mission-based coordination and system-level shared services, while detailed policies, funding arrangements, governance mechanisms, and implementation plans would be developed later.
    Motion passed, 8-0.

Other

36. Public Comments
    There were no public comments.

Adjourn

Chair Black adjourned the meeting at 4:42 p.m., CT.