2026 Joint Boards Meeting

State Board of Higher Education (Host)
State Board for Career and Technical Education
Education Standards and Practices
State Board of Public School Education

Brynhild Haugland Room – State Capitol
600 E. Boulevard Ave., Bismarck ND

Tuesday, September 29, 2026 9:00 am – 3:30 pm CST

Call to Order:

The Joint Boards meeting was called to order at 9:05 am CST by Lisa Johnson, Deputy Commissioner at NDUS.

Present:

SBHE: Curtis Biller, Anna Kinney, Commissioner Brent Sanford. Kevin Black was present online.
SBCTE: Wayde Sick, Eric Nelson, Mike McHugh, Morgan Forness, Superintendent Levi Bachmeier, Sonia Meehl, Jason Rohr, Phil Davis
ESPB: Dr. Becky Pitkin, Jennifer Bladow
SBPSE: Wayde Sick, Eric Nelson, Mike McHugh, Morgan Forness, Superintendent Levi Bachmeier, Sonia Meehl, Jason Rohr

Other members and guests present, in person and online: Jennifer Ferderer, Nicole Kessler from SBCTE, Lisa Johnson, Claire Gunwall, Christina Pieske, Dr. Josh Deere, Dr. Crystal Alberts, Edynn Glatt, Bethany Kadrmas, Meredith Larson, Chris Pieske from SBHE, Dr. Cory Steiner, Lyndsi Engstrom from SBPSE and SBCTE.

Welcome
Commissioner Sanford welcomed everyone to the Joint Boards meeting.

Introductions
Committee members introduced the board members attending in person or online and briefly explained each board's responsibilities.

Approval of 2025 Joint Boards Meeting Minutes

Dr. Becky Pitkin moved to approve the 2025 Meeting Minutes, as presented. Seconded by Eric Nelson. Motion passed unanimously.

ND CTE Be Legendary Community Engagement Presentation

Sonia Meehl and Jason Rohr explained how the North Dakota State Board for Career and Technical Education redesigned its governance around student outcomes, goals, guardrails, and results monitoring. The board established three five-year, measurable student outcome goals: increasing CTE concentrator attainment, increasing workforce readiness, and ensuring equitable access to high-quality CTE programs. Each goal identifies the measured population, baseline, final and interim targets, achievement date, and measurement tool, and the goals align with North Dakota's PK-12 strategic vision and themes such as career awareness, quality personnel, and student-centered instruction.

Modernized Career Clusters

Wayde Sick, Director of Career and Technical Education, presented North Dakota's implementation of the modernized national career clusters framework, including industry-based pathways, updated career-ready practices, coordinated plans of study, educator feedback, and planned postsecondary and general-education alignment. The updated framework places 12 career-ready practices at its center, including leadership, communication, critical thinking, collaboration, digital skills, resiliency, time management, innovation, financial stewardship, career-path navigation, consideration of environmental and social impacts, and application of academic and technical skills.

Funding CTE and Technical Education Policy

Wayde Sick outlined the new 2026–27 CTE funding policy, which replaces confusing cost reimbursement with base, performance, access, and operational allocations designed to improve equity, reward outcomes, reduce administrative burden, and provide earlier payments. The prior reimbursement model was considered unsustainable, administratively heavy, difficult to explain to legislators and stakeholders, and unable to distinguish minimum-compliance programs from high-performing programs. The policy is intended to align funding with the board's student outcome goals. Each eligible program receives a base allocation proportional to the percentage of FTE devoted to high-school CTE programming. Mr. Sick said CTE directors feared that incentive-based funding would reduce their allocations, but the formulas now provide greater predictability by linking funding to FTE, programs, member schools, and enrollment. He reported that many centers are seeing increases.

Community Stakeholder Survey

Superintendent Levi Bachmeier described the statewide vision as ensuring that all students graduate choice ready with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to succeed. The framework spans DPI, CTE, and other publicly funded education entities and includes academic proficiency, engagement, graduation readiness, and reduced achievement disparities. DPI commissioned a scientifically representative poll rather than relying only on voluntary feedback, seeking perspectives across age, income, geography, and family circumstances. Survey respondents ranked interpersonal skills, basic life skills, mental health, career exposure and job-shadow opportunities, and choice ready-related outcomes highly. Lisa Johnson

noted the overlap between the survey priorities and work across CTE and higher education, especially wellness, career exploration, work-based learning, internships, clinicals, co-ops, and teacher retention. The agencies intend to use their existing tools and partnerships to put more career and workplace experiences in front of students.

Federal Accountability Measures

Superintendent Bachmeier stated that North Dakota uses one accountability plan rather than separate state and federal plans because the state believes two systems create confusion and make it harder for citizens and schools to understand priorities. The proposed changes are intended to ensure that the statewide vision is reflected in how school performance is measured. DPI presented proposed changes to the Interim Legislative Education Committee on September 15 and surveyed school districts, receiving responses representing 97% of public-school enrollment. Superintendent Bachmeier said DPI will continue working with CTE to develop measures for communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and related skills for a future accountability cycle.

Pathways for Teacher Licensure

Becky Pitkin described how the Education Standards and Practices Board is expanding teacher-entry pathways to address shortages while maintaining coursework, clinical practice, mentoring, and other safeguards intended to protect teacher quality and students. She stated that the central challenge is meeting schools' need for teachers without lowering standards or allowing geography to determine educational quality. Dr. Pitkin said increased flexibility has been paired with requirements intended to maintain preparation, supervision, clinical experience, mentoring, and relevant coursework.

Keep, Attract, Advance

Commissioner Sanford presented the board-approved One NDUS plan, which seeks to make the 11-campus system operate more collaboratively through shared services, coordinated academic capacity, local access, workforce alignment, and a unified student and employer experience. The strategic plan followed a year-long comprehensive governance review involving structured interviews, organizational audits, benchmarking, higher-education trend analysis, and more than 400 participants. The State Board of Higher Education adopted the commissioner's One NDUS recommendation on September 24, 2026.

The plan identifies three major goals: keep more North Dakota students in North Dakota, attract and retain more out-of-state students, and help more North Dakota adults complete and advance. NDUS and DPI are working to better understand where students categorized as workforce-ready or military-ready go after graduation, since current data more reliably tracks postsecondary enrollment. Commissioner Sanford said roughly 59% of recent graduates were tracked into postsecondary education within 12 months, leaving a substantial group requiring further study.

COMPASS: NDUS/MHEC/Golden Path Partnership Update

Patrick Mineer presented Golden Path Solutions' Compass platform as a shared infrastructure connecting students, schools, employers, colleges, agencies, chambers, and associations across grades

6–16 to support career exploration, work-based learning, four-year planning, and workforce forecasting. Mr. Mineer said Golden Path's goal is a connected community in which employers engage with schools and students, education and workforce organizations collaborate, and processes are simple, systematic, scalable, and measurable. Compass supports ND CTE's career exploration and work-based learning goals, DPI's four-year rolling plan and choice ready reporting, NDUS college and program promotion. Through a Midwest Higher Education Compact (MHEC) grant, Golden Path is rolling Compass out to all 11 NDUS schools, with five tribal colleges included at no incremental cost. Institutions have been configured and trained, programs are being published, and remaining work includes single sign-on through Campus Connection, storing the NDUS EMPLID to connect high-school and college profiles, tribal-college onboarding, and coordination with tools such as Handshake.

Where We Stand Together: The AI Landscape Across Education

SBHE member, Anna Kinney, framed artificial intelligence as a continuing change-management and alignment challenge for K-12 and higher education, emphasizing that students are not the villains of the discussion and that broad agreement on one top-down policy is unlikely. Ms. Kinney argued that AI has exposed rather than created longstanding assessment problems and recommended AI-resilient assessment designs that measure authentic learning, process, judgment, reflection, and application instead of relying primarily on surveillance or a single submitted product. Most faculty viewed AI writing a first draft, generating an outline, or giving rubric-based feedback as cheating, while larger minority groups considered some of those uses legitimate; approximately 60% viewed uses such as grammar or fact-checking as legitimate. Ms. Kinney said these differences reflect what an assignment is actually intended to assess. Ms. Kinney connected responsible AI use to employer expectations for critical thinking, communication, analytical and quantitative reasoning, adaptability, teamwork, and professional judgment rather than simple tool operation.

Participant Reflection and Observations

Participants reflected on the growth of dual credit and the need for personalized advising so students' accumulated credits, goals, course availability, and postsecondary pathways are aligned rather than assumed to fit a standard sequence. Participants discussed meeting students where they are through better course availability, sequencing, and opportunities to test out or demonstrate proficiency. The aim is to avoid requiring every student to repeat the same A-to-Z sequence when prior learning or individual goals support a different path.

Lisa Johnson thanked those representing the boards, participants online, and presenters for thoughtful conversations.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:40 p.m., CST.