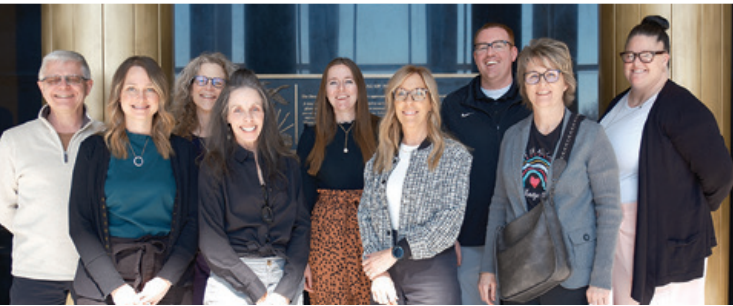


# YEAR IN REVIEW 2025



**INSIDE:** Year-End Reports on Activities From our Board of Directors, Aspiring Educators, NDU-Retired, ESPs, Big Wins in Advocacy & Professional Development, Plus Profiles of 2026 ND Teacher of the Year & Finalists

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Hello, friends!

It is my pleasure to welcome each of you to the 2025 NDU Year in Review edition of *United Voices*.

At ND United, we feel that it is imperative that we reflect on our work and take the opportunity to fully appreciate what we all have accomplished over the course of the year just ending. In this Year in Review issue, we want to highlight the important work we have done on behalf of you, our respected and valued members.

Executive Director Chad Oban and I are happy to have the opportunity to share our takes on the year that was, even as all of us prepare to advocate for great public schools, universities, and service in 2026!

## Welcome to a New Year

By Nick Archuleta,  
ND United President



## A Year of Strength, Solidarity and Progress — And an Even Bigger Year Ahead

By Chad Oban,  
ND United  
Executive Director



As we close out another remarkable year at North Dakota United, I need to first say to our incredible members — thank you. Your voice, courage, and unwavering belief in the power of public service continue to drive everything we do. What an honor it is to go to work every day on your behalf.

I also want to express my deep gratitude for the dedicated staff who pour their hearts into this organization every single day. Your work strengthens our schools, supports our public employees and empowers our members.

This year, together, we once again proved what's possible when we stand united. We defeated vouchers — again and again and again — protecting critical funding for our public schools. We stopped harmful attempts to increase the cost of health insurance for public employees. And we secured meaningful wins at negotiation tables across the state, improving wages, working conditions and respect for those who keep North Dakota running.

These victories were hard-won, and they belong to the entire NDU family.

As we look to the year ahead, our work is far from finished. We must continue to grow our union — one conversation, one worksite, one new member at a time. We must prepare for a legislative session where the stakes will once again be high: fighting for more K-12 and higher education funding, raises for all public employees, ensuring affordable health insurance for every public employee, and, yes, defeating vouchers once more.

With your passion and commitment, I have no doubt we will rise to meet every challenge. Thank you for all you do — and here's to an even stronger year ahead.

## Communications: Year in Review

Clear, consistent communication is the lifeline of any member-driven organization, like ours at North Dakota United. In a state such as North Dakota — where distance, weather and wildly different workplace realities can make connection a challenge — strong communication isn't just nice to have. It's how we build solidarity across hundreds of communities, elevate member voices, and ensure every educator and public employee knows they are part of something bigger, stronger and deeply rooted.

This year, our collective efforts in communications and public relations focused intensely on one mission: making our members' union more accessible, more transparent and more visible than ever. Through our website, our magazine, our social media presence and our expanding digital tools, we've worked to tell the stories that define us, respond quickly to emerging issues and keep members at the center of everything we share.

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### Strengthening Our Digital Front Door: [ndunited.org](https://ndunited.org)



Our website continues to be the primary hub for up-to-date information about advocacy, member benefits, scholarships, grants, bargaining resources and upcoming events. Over the past year, we've made strategic improvements to help members find what they need faster and understand the full scope of what their union provides.

These changes reflect our commitment to creating a website that functions as a true service portal — not just a newsfeed. It's your union at your fingertips, anytime and anywhere. Check it out at [www.ndunited.org](https://www.ndunited.org) today, and if you haven't already set up a members-only login, be sure to click on the "Sign Up" button at the bottom of the navigation bar.

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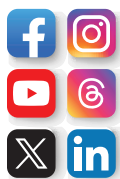
### United Voices Magazine: Celebrating Members, Elevating Stories

Our member magazine, *United Voices*, continues to be one of the most powerful platforms we have for shining light on the talents, challenges and triumphs of North Dakota's educators and public employees. This year's issues featured in-depth profiles, legislative updates, member-led initiatives and photo- and video-rich coverage of events across the state.

Every article we publish has one goal: to reflect back to our members the pride, professionalism and humanity that fuels public education and service in North Dakota. Each issue is available online at [www.ndunited.org/united-voices](https://www.ndunited.org/united-voices), making it easier than ever for members to read, share and revisit stories at any time.

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### Building Community & Visibility Through Social Media



Social media remains one of our most immediate tools for connecting with members in real time. Across Facebook, Instagram, Threads, YouTube, X/Twitter and LinkedIn, we share updates on union advocacy, celebrate member achievements, highlight scholarship opportunities, promote professional development and provide rapid-response communication on issues that matter most.

These channels help us reach members where they already are — scrolling between classes, on lunch breaks, or winding down at home. They also give ND United a public voice that grows our visibility statewide.

On behalf of the ND United Board of Directors, welcome to the 2025 Year in Review! All of us who have the honor and privilege of serving on the Board thank you for allowing us to represent the broad spectrum of public service constituencies from across North Dakota. The individuals on our Board contribute much time and talent to ensure the smooth operation of our organization and to raise your concerns to the highest level.

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### Relationship Building

Great teaching and learning are predicated on great relationships, and the same is true of legislative outcomes. Over the course of the last legislative session, we worked hard to build winning relationships with policymakers, the public and education stakeholder groups. The result was a successful legislative session. ND United's collaboration with the ND School Boards Association, the ND Council of Educational Leaders, ND Small Organized Schools and others helped to provide a unified front as we lobbied for legislation favorable to K-12 public education. Our continued excellent relationships with NDPERS and various agency heads and staff allow us to share the concerns of our non-education public employee members as policies affecting them are developed.

In addition to relationship building with the Legislature, we have established other important avenues of communication with others. Recently, NDU President Nick Archuleta and Executive Director Chad Oban met with the Commissioner of the North Dakota University System, Brent Sanford. We discussed several matters important to our higher education members, including tenure policies, potential changes to the H1 Visa program, funding and leadership.

Chad and Nick have also met with Gov. Kelly Armstrong on several issues and worked with him against legislation that would have changed the PERS health plan to a non-grandfathered plan and would have pushed the cost of doing so onto public employees.

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### ND4PS

Speaking of collaboration, we are immensely proud of the work that we are doing alongside our partners in advancing the work of North Dakotans for Public Schools (ND4PS). Suffice it to say that ND4PS's commitment to strengthening, protecting and celebrating public education in our state resonates with all of us dedicated to educating our future and strengthening our communities..

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### Together For School Meals

Over the course of the past few legislative sessions, ND United has advocated alongside food security organizations, school nutrition professionals, registered dietitians, educational leaders and advocacy organizations to make free school lunches a reality for every child in North Dakota.

ND United is proud to join these other advocates in supporting Together for School Meals, an advocacy group with the goal of putting a measure on the ballot that would require the state to provide free breakfast and lunch to public school children in ND. A ND United poll shows that 79% of respondents support the idea, as a recent poll conducted by the ND News Cooperative showed 82% support it.





Frannie Tunseth, a math and reading teacher for grades 4-8 at Mayville-Portland-Clifford-Galesburg Public School was named the 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year at a ceremony held in Memorial Hall in the state Capitol on Sept. 29

# Teacher of the Year Tunseth Touts Schools as 'Heartbeats' of Rural Communities

On Friday, Sept. 29, at the state Capitol in Bismarck, educators, policymakers and education stakeholders gathered in Memorial Hall to honor four of the best teachers in North Dakota. These four – Emily Dawes, a literary specialist at Lake Agassiz Elementary in Grand Forks; Hannah Sagvold, a business education teacher for Lisbon Public School; Frannie Tunseth, a math and reading teacher for grades 4-8 at Mayville-Portland-Clifford-Galesburg Public School; and Leah Wheeling, a sixth-grade teacher of physical education and digital literacy at Simle Middle School in Bismarck – were the four finalists in contention for the 2026 ND Teacher of the Year award. A ceremony was held at 1:00 p.m. to announce this year's winner, and the assembled audience didn't have to wait long

for the official announcement from Superintendent Kirsten Baesler.

"I don't want to keep you in suspense any longer," Baesler said, "I don't have an envelope, so I'll just come right up and announce and tell you that the 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year is Frannie Tunseth of Mayville."

"It is my belief that teaching is not a job, it's a privilege," Tunseth said in her acceptance speech. "At the heart of my work is a belief that all students can – and will – succeed when given the support the encouragement and the high expectations they deserve. For me, that commitment is rooted in serving students in our rural communities. In these places, schools are more than classrooms, they are gathering places where families connect, traditions are

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From left, Nick Archuleta, Leah Wheeling, Frannie Tunseth, Emily Dawes, Hannah Sagvold and Superintendent Kirsten Baesler.

## Teacher of the Year

*Continued from previous page.*

carried forward, and opportunities are created for the next generation.

"It is true that rural schools may face unique challenges, distance, resources and access but they were also places of incredible strength, resilience and hope. When we invest in rural schools we invest in a heartbeat of entire communities."

For Gov. Kelly Armstrong, this year's Teacher of the Year ceremony was his first since being elected, and he began his remarks with a lighthearted joke about how these events are an opportunity to turn the tables on educators, in a way. "I also did lunch with all the finalists over at the residence," Armstrong said. "Nick (Archuleta) had them all stand, and then Kirsten just had Frannie stand up here. It's like

the upper hand is on the other foot. Teachers have to stand for an extraordinary period of time."

The Governor reflected on this year's session of the Legislature, and the amount of time dedicated to debating property tax levels in our state. "We're really good at overcomplicating things in government," he said. "But at the end of the day, every other job we do here, from public safety to tax policy to criminal justice policy to states' rights versus federal rights, none of that matters if the next generation of North Dakotans aren't prepared to pick up that mantle and go into those careers, whether it's law enforcement, EMT, doctors, accountants, and all of that."



Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth and Governor Kelly Armstrong with commemorative license plate.





**NDU President Nick Archuleta and 2026 Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth speak at the ceremony.**

NDU President Nick Archuleta congratulated each of our four finalists for their accomplishments. "Today, we gathered four outstanding educators who have been named finalists for the North Dakota Teacher of the Year," Archuleta said. "Each one of them represents not just excellence in their own classroom, but also the absolute best of what it means to teach, to lead, and to inspire."

Archuleta also reminded us that our state's education system is not limited in outstanding talent and vision to this year's finalists, but these four represent the abundance of passionate individuals, with innovative minds and caring hearts, teaching in classrooms all over the state. "(Our finalists) understand that as a society, we don't do anything more important than educate our future," he said. "As we celebrate the distinction with this year's finalists, let us also remember that

they represent thousands of other teachers across North Dakota, who are working with equal passion and commitment. We cannot possibly honor them all individually, but through Emily, Hannah, Frannie and Leah, we can say thank you to every teacher in every classroom in the state."

Tunseth closed her speech by making a similar point, that no one of us can ever accomplish nearly as much as we all can by working together. "Every day in the classroom, we have the opportunity to make a lasting difference," Tunseth said. "I'm inspired by the work of my fellow educators to make that possible. To all of the educators in North Dakota, thank you for your passion, for your heart and for your dedication. This work is only the beginning. And together, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of our North Dakota students, and in the future of education."



## Relationships Come First for Tunseth

How North Dakota's Teacher of the Year builds hope in rural schools

Every day, when middle schoolers walk into 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth's classroom at May-Port CG Public Schools, they likely carry with them a lot of thoughts about who they are and what things they are — and aren't — capable of doing.

Maybe they're "bad at school."

Maybe they're "not a reader."

Maybe they aren't fans of Cher's music.

Tunseth's job — and her gift — is to quietly dismantle those conclusions students make on what they can't do, while building up their confidence in what they can.

"I really believe students need to feel seen as people before students," Tunseth said. "Middle school can be a scary time. What's fundamentally the same is relationships. Students need relationships and adults that sincerely care about them as people."

Tunseth's belief in the importance of relationships is fully on display the afternoon of Oct. 30. Today is "Throwback Thursday," in which Tunseth plays a popular song from the past and asks the class to critique. Today's throwback is "If I Could Turn Back Time" by Cher, and she asks them all to write down

their own initial impressions on a hit track she grew up with and seems to still adore. She then collects their assessments and reads aloud their honest takes.

"Usually, I don't care for songs like this, but the song's beat is incredible," one student wrote. "Overall, 'If I Could Turn Back Time' makes me want to turn back time and listen to it, over and over." As Tunseth reads out this last part, she becomes visually thrilled. "Oh, I love it so much!" she declares. "Wasn't that really clever, though? Using the words of the lyrics and the song title, to like, play on that?"

For Tunseth, the road to success doesn't start with test scores or report cards. Rather, it begins with a sense that they belong. In her intervention work with grades 4-8, she prioritizes moments that build confidence — sometimes even the smallest ones.

"I don't want students leaving proud of a grade; I want them proud of a moment," she said. "Success isn't just academics. Sometimes it's sharing out loud for the first time. Sometimes, it's walking to the door instead of running."

That philosophy guided one of her most successful classroom projects: using book trailers — short,

visual introductions to novels — to reignite reading motivation among students who had long disconnected from literacy.

“These were kids where reading felt hard and frustrating,” she said. “But just because reading is hard doesn’t mean kids aren’t readers.”

By removing the initial barrier of dense text and replacing it with engaging visuals and authentic curiosity, students began to feel engaged. Eventually, they created their own book trailers — celebrating books they chose and read on their own terms.

“If a student only reads one book all year, that’s fantastic,” Tunseth said. “Look how far they came.”

At its core, the strategy wasn’t about technology or trends. It was about agency. “Belonging is the key to anything that’s successful in a classroom,” she said. “Before we can do anything sustainable, academically or socially, they need to know they belong.”

Tunseth grew up in a small town, Thief River Falls, Minn., before moving here to attend the University of North Dakota. Now settled in Mayville with her family, she sees rural schooling not as a limitation — but a powerful advantage.

“The more people we have caring about the student and being able to call them by name out in the community and celebrate who they

*Continued on next page.*



Frannie Tunseth, 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year, dances to the song “If I Could Turn Back Time” by Cher in her classroom as students write their reflections.

## WINNER – Teacher of the Year

*Continued from previous page.*

are,” she said, “the more likely they are to have success.”

As one of the leaders behind the school’s implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Tunseth has helped move her building from reactive discipline and academic support to proactive, student-centered planning.

“Before MTSS, we were reacting to problems,” she said. “Now we’re responding to them.”

The shift wasn’t just structural, but cultural, too. “We’ve shifted from ‘your students’ to ‘our students,’” she said. “Every child in our building belongs to all of us.”

Her leadership extends beyond her building. She co-facilitates inquiry-based professional development for teachers across North Dakota — a model built on collaboration rather than compliance. “Teaching shouldn’t be something done to teachers,” she said. “It should be done with them.”

She’s also pursuing her Ph.D. focused on teacher agency — a concept she sees as essential to both student success and teacher retention.

As Teacher of the Year, Tunseth feels both honored and humbled — aware that the spotlight gives her an opportunity to advocate, but also a responsibility to speak honestly. “I feel the weight of it,” she said. “I want to make sure that I do it justice. I want to bring forward the stories that need to be told.”

One of the biggest concerns she carries: teacher retention. “We have teachers leaving at an alarming rate, and that’s unsustainable for students,” she said. “This isn’t just a salary issue.”

She’s calling for deeper conversations — and real-world exposure — from decision makers. “I would love lawmakers to spend a day in the classroom,” Tunseth said. “Follow a teacher. See the hats we wear. See the challenges and the magic.”

Despite the challenges, Tunseth remains deeply hopeful — not because of policies or promises, but because of people.

“What gives me hope? The people. Our teachers. Our students. Our community,” she said.





# Sagvold Builds Local Legacy

## How one CTE teacher is helping to shape Lisbon's future



In Lisbon, local pride is not whispered — it hangs from storefront windows, smiles from yard signs and greets you the moment you turn onto Main Street. For high school business and CTE teacher Hannah Sagvold, that sense of community is more than atmosphere. It's fuel.

"You drive around and you see how much pride there is in our school," she said. "Knowing that you have the support of the community. ... It makes the hard days worth it. It makes you want to try harder, and do more, and be more present."

That connection to place is all the more striking because Sagvold's path to Lisbon started a long way from the Great Plains of North America. She grew up in Queensland, Australia — "an hour from the beach," she recalls with a laugh — and never expected to build a life in rural North Dakota. But life has a way of leading people where they're supposed to be. In her case, it involved meeting a North Dakota ranch kid who was spending a year working in Australia. "It worked out," she said. "We got married and had two kids." A new home followed.

That sense of belonging shows up in the way she teaches. Sagvold's approach centers on making students feel seen — deeply, individually and unmistakably. "I want my students to feel seen," she said. "I want them to know they're

valued and that what they want to do matters."

One of her favorite memories comes from her years in special education, when she designed a full math unit around a student's family ranch. He had been disengaged, frustrated and ready to give up on school entirely. But once the math reflected his world — feed ratios, acreage, herd counts — something shifted. "He locked in," Sagvold said. "I knew I'd never use that unit again, but I knew it was going to help him. So, I did it."

Today, Sagvold carries that same philosophy into her CTE classroom, where students run a full school-based enterprise and digitize more than a century of Lisbon yearbooks. "They're creating something that's going to leave a legacy," she said. "Five or ten years from now, they'll come back and say, 'I helped start that.'"

Being named County Teacher of the Year and a finalist for North Dakota Teacher of the Year pushed her to reflect, but it didn't change her compass. "Awards are nice, but they don't define impact," she said. "The real impact is in the community."

And for Sagvold, that community is exactly where she's meant to be — planting seeds, building pride and helping students see the value they carry into the world long after they leave her classroom.



## **Wheeler Takes Play Seriously**

**Bismarck PE teacher brings the fun into her instruction**

Inside the gym at Simle Middle School in Bismarck, laughter tends to show up before the students do. It's a good signal that you've entered Leah Wheeling's world — a place where play isn't an afterthought or a reward, but the framework through which kids learn to collaborate, think critically and navigate the wonderfully chaotic terrain of adolescence.

Wheeling teaches both physical education and digital literacy, two subjects that appear to sit on opposite ends of the academic table. She smiles at the idea. "Every kid needs to move their body to be healthy," she said. "And every kid is going to come across a screen and make choices about how they interact with others digitally. Both of those things shape their total wellness."

For her, those subjects aren't separate lanes — they're parallel roads that lead toward the same goal: helping students build sturdy, lifelong habits. In any given week, her students might be rollerblading, running a "zombie hunt," building core strength or learning how to protect their privacy online. And somewhere in the middle of it all, they're playing. That's the thread that ties everything together.

"Every person needs to play," Wheeling said. "If we played more, we'd have fewer problems. Losing a

game gives you a huge opportunity to learn — about yourself, your emotions and how to move forward."

Wheeling's love for play spills far beyond the gym. Her "Board Gaming to Teach 21st Century Skills" initiative started as a \$1,000 grant from the NDU Foundation and grew into a school-wide culture shift — homerooms bonding over strategy games, staff voluntarily giving up planning periods to learn and laugh together, and families joining in during community game nights. The side effect? Students practicing decision-making, communication, empathy and resilience without even realizing it.

She teaches the way she learns: collaboratively, joyfully and relentlessly. "It takes a community to stay in this profession and enjoy it," she said. "When you have those big wins, you have people to celebrate with. And when your colleague has a big win, you get to take some of that energy back to your classroom."

As a leader in ND SHAPE and a Teacher of the Year finalist, she wishes more policymakers understood the full picture of what specialists provide. "It's not just giving kids a movement break," she said. "It's quality education. It's helping them understand why they moved. Specialists build essential skills, and kids thrive when those spaces are valued."

# Dawes Found Self in Books

Grand Forks educator returned to classroom to specialize in literacy



When Emily Dawes, a finalist for 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year and member of the Grand Forks Education Association, talks about teaching, she doesn't describe it as a profession. To her, it is a calling.

"As a little girl, I struggled to read, and I stuttered," she said. "There were a lot of opportunities for me to feel really bad about myself, because I wasn't like the kids who could just read. But my special education teachers made me feel like I could do it — and that's what I want for every student I teach."

That desire to help children feel capable and seen has guided Dawes throughout her career. After teaching for several years, she paused to raise her four children, then returned to the classroom with renewed purpose. "When I came back, I realized I didn't actually know how to teach kids to read," she said. "Why would you ever want to be a teacher and not be effective?"

That realization pushed her to pursue a master's degree in reading education and, eventually, to embrace the Science of Reading — a shift in literacy instruction grounded in how the brain learns. "There are kids you can stick in a closet and they'll come out reading," she said with a laugh. "But a lot of kids need explicit instruction. The Science

of Reading gives every child that chance."

This year, Dawes transitioned from teaching first grade at Kelly Elementary to working as a literacy specialist at Lake Agassiz Elementary in Grand Forks, where she helps other teachers strengthen reading instruction across classrooms. "I wasn't really motivated to leave the classroom. ... I just felt a door open, and I stepped through it," she said. "Now I feel like I'm sitting in my calling."

Her students and colleagues describe her as joyful and endlessly encouraging, a teacher who sings her way through lessons and treats laughter as an essential learning tool. "I sing about everything," she said. "Transitions, lessons — if the kids look like they're about to fall asleep, I might start singing."

When she was named Grand Forks Teacher of the Year and a finalist for North Dakota Teacher of the Year, Dawes' first reaction was disbelief. "The little girl who could hardly read — how could it be me?" she said. "Maybe it's a good little story for the underdog. Maybe one of those little girls I work with who struggles with reading will be Teacher of the Year someday."

## Education Support Professionals: Year in Review

North Dakota's public schools run on the talent and heart of our amazing support staff — the para pros, secretaries, custodians, tech wizards, bus drivers, food service crews, nurses and so many more who keep everything moving, every single day.

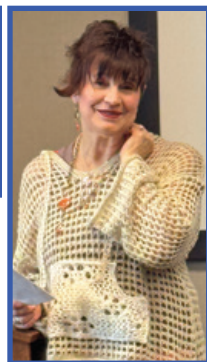
Likewise, all of our Education Support Professional (ESP) members and the North Dakota United ESP Advisory Committee (ESPAC) kept busy throughout 2025. Here are a few highlights from this past year:

- Four members of ESPAC – Dana Mork and Laurie Mahrer, both from Mandan; Barb DuBord, of Kindred; and Harlan Stewart, from Bismarck – attended the **National Education Association's ESP National Conference** in March, which was held in Louisville, Ky.



- The **2025 NDU ESP Conference**, held in Bismarck on April 5, provided our members with a range of professional development sessions on topics including: a report on the NEA ESP Conference from attendees; and presentations on Trauma-Informed Care, Why Anxiety is a Good Thing, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout, and Understanding Your Leadership Style.

- Our yearly **NDU ESP of the Year award** again had a lot of deserving nominees in 2025, and from them, three finalists were selected. All three — **Joan Hall**, an instructional aide at Myhre Elementary in Bismarck; **Laurie Holcomb**, a paraeducator at South Middle School in Grand Forks; and **Brenda Muller**, an elementary secretary in Hillsboro — were celebrated at their schools with special award ceremonies in front of their colleagues and students. This year's winner, Joan Hall, was officially announced as ESP of the Year during the NDU ESP Conference, and then gave a beautiful speech at Delegate Assembly the following week. Go to [www.ndunited.org/united-voices](http://www.ndunited.org/united-voices) to find feature articles and video packages our team produced in honor of the three finalists.



- **Harlan Stewart**, a special education para at Myhre, was accepted into the **NEA ESP Leadership Institute** this summer. Stewart's application to ESPLI — which is described by NEA as a "powerful leadership development program, grounded in diversity, equity and cultural competence — was selected from numerous applications from ESP members of NEA affiliates across the country. He is also the first North Dakotan to be accepted into this prestigious program!



**North Dakota United-Retired (NDU-R) provides retired professionals with benefits, community and an invitation to advocate for public education, public services and the professions to which they dedicated their lives. NDU-R members help effect positive changes for North Dakota's children, public educators, public employees and communities.**

2025 featured the launch of the NDU-Retired Book Club. This book club for retired union educators serves as a vibrant community where educators can continue to engage intellectually and socially.

Each session, members gather to explore a diverse selection of literature, spanning genres and themes that resonate with their shared experiences and interests. Discussions are rich and reflective, allowing participants to draw from their vast wealth of knowledge and perspectives gained throughout their careers. This club not only fosters a love for reading but also strengthens connections among members, offering a supportive environment that encourages lifelong learning and camaraderie in a meaningful post-retirement chapter. Each session lasts for six weeks, and is free for NDU-Retired members, though you are responsible for obtaining a copy of the book for yourself. There were 55 book club participants in 2025. Please visit [courses.ndunited.org](https://courses.ndunited.org) to register for the 2026 series.



The NDU-Retired Advisory Board spent the year advocating at NDU's two lobby days at the state Capitol, the NDU Delegate Assembly in Bismarck, and the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting and NEA Representative Assembly in Portland, Ore.

We were thrilled to partner with local education associations for their retirement celebrations this spring in Grand Forks, Mandan and West Fargo. NDU-R promoted membership while assisting the locals with the cost of the events, thanks to funding from the NEA-Retired organizing grant.

### North Dakota United-Retired Advisory Board members:

**Karen Askerooth, President, Fargo**  
**Toni Gumeringer, Vice President, Bismarck**  
**Gale Haug, Secretary, Minnesota/Arizona**  
**JoNell Bakke, Northeast Member, Grand Forks**  
**Linda Benson, Public Employee Member, Minot**  
**Mary Carlson, Northwest Member, Glenburn**  
**Dakota Draper, Southeast Member, Fargo**  
**Stephen Hayton, Public Employee Member, Horace**  
**Erik Holland, Public Employee Member, Arizona**  
**Bill Klimpel, Public Employee Member, Minot**  
**Tim Thueson, Southwest Member, Bismarck**

NDU-Retired continues their commitment to honor the service of our members with a secure, healthy and productive retirement.

***WE ARE RETIRED,  
BUT ACTIVE AND  
ENERGIZED!***

## Aspiring Educators: Year in Review

In 2025, the Student North Dakota United (SNDU) group has continued to grow. We have seen a 2.5% increase in membership from the 2024-25 school year and a 6.3% increase from the 2022-23 school year. Our strength is in our numbers, so we believe more student members is a positive sign for SNDU, North Dakota United, and the schools and students those SNDU members will soon serve within K-12 education across the state.

This year, higher education campuses and SNDU members across the state hosted Know Your Contract and Educator Ethics events, with a little help from NDU staff. We believe providing strong professional development opportunities is essential as educators kick off their careers, and the strong turnout at these events demonstrates that our SNDU members agree!

### SNDU CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT: Mayville State University Student Education Association

This year, the Mayville State University Student Education Chapter (SEA) led an initiative to promote early literacy and social-emotional learning at home. SEA partnered with the Child Development Programs (CDP) on Mayville State's campus to find and distribute books for students in CDP classrooms.

The books were centered around the theme of “kindness” – one of three pillars of CDP’s approach to early-childhood education. SNDU used chapter funding to research, purchase and distribute 58 age-appropriate books to educators and children in CDP classrooms, for infants, toddlers, two- to three-year-olds and preschoolers. They also provided additional resources — like a kindness calendar — to improve literacy and social-emotional learning beyond the classroom.



### SNDU CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT:

#### Dickinson State University Student Education Association

The Dickinson State University SNDU chapter applied for and was awarded a full \$2,000 CREATE Grant by the Teacher Quality Department of the National Education Association's Center for Professional Excellence & Student Learning. The chapter used grant funds to host a STEM Carnival for students at Solen Public Schools on the Standing Rock Reservation. This is the first time a student chapter in North Dakota has received a CREATE Grant in many years!

The STEM Carnival, hosted in association with Gateway to Science, brought hands-on science, technology, engineering and math activities to Cannon Ball Elementary, engaging students with interactive stations that sparked curiosity, creativity and joy. DSU's SNDU members led the activities, which gave them valuable teaching opportunities while fostering meaningful connections with the community.





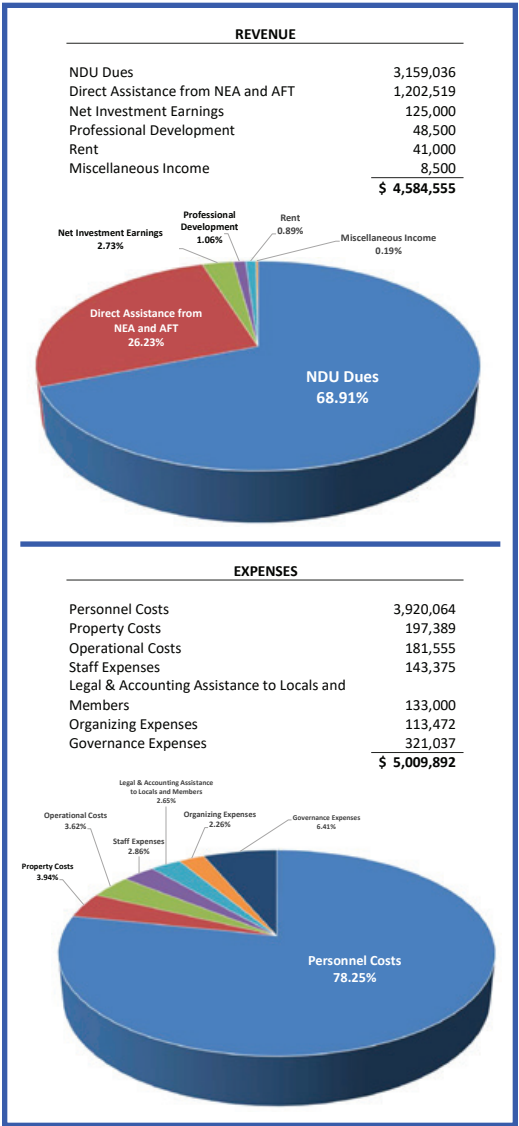
# Budget: Year in Review

As a union, our strength comes from our organized people and organized resources. Each and every member of North Dakota United voluntarily contributes to ensure we are a strong and united front for our classrooms, our workplaces and our communities. Our elected board, managers and staff at North Dakota United take our charge to steward these resources effectively and efficiently to achieve our goals.

At the 2025 Delegate Assembly, our annual meeting where elected delegates from our locals set the direction for the coming fiscal year (Sept. 1, 2025-Aug. 31, 2026) delegates from across the state approved our budget with the revenue and expense categories that you can see here.

A couple of items that we would like to draw attention to in the overview:

- Our national affiliates, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, are projected to have invested more than \$1 million in grant funds to our state this past year to help provide legal assistance and staff support for locals across the state. In addition, NEA and AFT contributed close to \$300,000 for our successful efforts to defeat school vouchers during the 2025 legislative session. Every year, ND United has regularly applied for and received valuable grant funding from our national affiliates that helps bolster our union's capacity for success in school district contract negotiations, organizing, member communications and public relations, and advocating for all our members' rights as public servants and educators.
- We have a staff that is second to none across the country, and that is where we spend the majority of our resources. These expenses help ensure that every local has access to the support and expertise they need to succeed, whether that is collectively at the bargaining table or expanding membership to ensure we have the power to earn better pay, benefits and working conditions.





North Dakota United empowers our members with high-quality, research-based professional development programs designed to share best practices, enhance classroom success and promote personal growth.

Book studies remain the bread and butter of ND United's professional development offerings. During the 2024-25 school year, educators registered for 2,744 professional development courses on a range of topics like artificial intelligence, classroom management and social-emotional learning.

### Support from the NDU Foundation

The NDU Foundation covers the costs of registration fees for all NDU members who choose to enroll in a professional development course, which would otherwise cost \$50 per registration. At the time of writing, members have registered for 883 courses through NDU PD since the start of the 2025-26 school year, **which means the NDU Foundation has already saved members more than \$44,000 in course fees.** During the 2024-2025 course cycle, the NDU Foundation saved members a total of \$137,200.

### Podcast PD

NDU is happy to continue to offer Podcast PD after much success in the program's first year. Podcast PD is perfect for busy educators, as participants can explore topics that relate to their professional interests in a convenient format that can match their busy schedules.

Participants submit a reflection paper for each session (podcast episode) they listen to. They earn one credit for every seven sessions and reflections they submit, and they can submit reflections on episodes from different podcasts to meet the requirements for credits. In other words, to receive credit, they don't have to submit seven reflections on seven episodes from (for example), the Wired Educator Podcast. They could submit one reflection from an episode of the Mel Robbins Podcast, another from an episode of the Literacy Talks Podcast, and so forth.

This year, the seven podcasts that can be used for credit are the following:

- Those Who Can't Teach Anymore
- Teach Me, Teacher
- The Wired Educator
- Truth for Teachers
- Literacy Talks
- The Mel Robbins Podcast
- Stepping into Special Education



Since Sept. 1, NDU has had more than 130 registrations for Podcast PD.

### Early Career Educator Cohorts

NDU also offers Early Career Educator Cohorts, which are catered toward members in the first seven years of their careers. In 2024-25, members registered for 248 spots, which allowed them to earn credits while building connections with peers from around the state.

NDU is proud to offer flexible, affordable professional development opportunities for our members. Our mission is to always support educators and public employees as they strive to meet their professional goals.

## Foundation: Year in Review



The purpose of the North Dakota United Foundation is to promote educational excellence and quality public service in North Dakota. The Foundation's goal is to aid educators, public servants, and students in achieving greater educational success.

The Foundation accomplishes this by offering specifically designed and administered grants and scholarships to individual educators, public servants and college students designed to enhance their skills. In addition, the Foundation administers funds for local education associations in Glenfield, Hillsboro, Minot, Oakes and Ray.

It is with pride that the Foundation's Board of Directors has established this special alliance with education and public service leaders who understand that their professional growth is the key to success.

### NDU Foundation Board of Directors:

Brenda Seehafer, Foundation President, active member, Rolla  
Nick Archuleta, NDU President, Mandan  
Alicia Bata, NDU Vice President-K-12, Cavalier  
Kala Christensen, NEA Director, Grand Forks  
Gary Feist, NDU Vice President-Public Employees, Bismarck  
Aaron Flynn, active member, Grand Forks  
Toni Gumeringer, NDU-Retired, Bismarck  
Clarice Hackman, active member, Fargo  
Derrick Hertz, general public member, Mandan  
Sheila Peterson, active member, Bismarck  
Jason Rohrer, general public member, Minot  
Kaitlin Walker, active member, Bottineau

Special thanks to outgoing NDU Foundation Board members for their dedication to public education and public service: Bret Dockter, Sarah Fox, Josh Standing Elk, and Lisa Wolf (past Foundation President).

### Giving Hearts Day:

Giving Hearts Day is a regional online giving event which raises funds for charities in North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota every year in February.

Ninety individuals contributed \$5,920 on Giving Hearts Day, which was matched by NDU for a total revenue of \$11,840. The revenue was credited to the endowments selected by the donor. If no endowment was selected, the gifts were credited to the NDU Memorial Endowment.

### Professional Development:

Promoting educational excellence through professional development has been a long-term goal of the NDU Foundation. With the dedication of 50% of the special assessment paid by NDU members to professional development, the Foundation was able to partner with the Professional Development team at NDU to again provide quality coursework at no cost to NDU members in 2025. This resulted in North Dakota United members saving \$142,500 in professional development course fees in 2025, a tremendous gift to our members.

At the date of publication, for the 2025-26 cycle there are 2,935 registrations for NDU professional development offerings including 60+ book studies, Podcast PD, Educator Ethics, Aspiring Educator events, NDU-Retired book club, in-person professional development presentations, Leadership & Advocacy Summit, Delegate Assembly, Lobby Day, Teacher of the Year events, and negotiations trainings.

## Scholarships and Grants:

The North Dakota United Foundation currently offers scholarships and grants specifically designed for individual educators, public servants, and college students to enhance their skills. Scholarships are available to North Dakota United members, including Student NDU and NDU-Retired members, as well as the dependents of all members. Twenty-two scholarships and grants were available in 2025, including two new year-round grant offerings:

- **The Betty Lu Lenthe Speech Education Grant** – Available to assist an individual member or group of members or their students in speech, debate, and drama activities. The award is open to individual members, students, student organizations, or educational institutions.
- **Harris & Arlyce Widmer Family Business Education Grant** – Available for an individual member or group of members to support student-oriented activities such as the Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Kappa, Junior Achievement, and/or Young Investment Clubs, etc.

In May, the North Dakota United Foundation announced that 59 NDU members and dependents, across twenty-five counties in North Dakota, had been selected to receive \$75,000 in scholarships and grants. Scholarships are open December 1st through March 31, and grants are awarded year-round on a rolling application basis. For more information on 2025 recipients and to apply, please visit: [ndunited.org/foundation/scholarships-and-grants](https://ndunited.org/foundation/scholarships-and-grants).

## Teacher of the Year Events:

The North Dakota United Foundation proudly partnered with the North Dakota State Teachers of the Year (NDSTOY) Chapter to offer a Day of Professional Learning for former Teachers of the Year and finalists on April 7 at the Heritage Center in Bismarck. The day provided Teachers of the Year with an opportunity to network, share best practices and participate in the ND legislative session. The NDSTOY spent time at the ND Legislature sitting in on the Senate Education Committee, participating in a Governor's office bill signing ceremony, and observing the passage of the school cell phone bill on the Senate floor. At the Heritage Center, seven of the state's best educators presented information on topics ranging from service learning, to music in the classroom, to high impact teaching. The participants ended the day with plans to return to their schools and share all they had gained with their colleagues.

On Sept. 26, the NDU Foundation hosted a Celebratory Luncheon at the ND Governor's Residence for the 2026 ND Teacher of the Year finalists, their friends and families, former Teachers of the Year, Governor & First Lady Armstrong, and partnering organizations. The luncheon was held before the Teacher of the Year announcement ceremony at the state Capitol. The Teacher of the Year events are made possible by generous donations from businesses across North Dakota.



## North Dakota United Delegate Assembly

**The NDU Delegate Assembly, held on April 12, 2025, in Bismarck, is our union's primary business meeting, in which ND United members elect state leaders, vote on important issues, and chart a course toward a better future.**

Women and men from different communities across the state, public workers from our K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, city, county and state employees, retired workers and aspiring educators, came together for the North Dakota United Delegate Assembly, held at Gateway to Science.

Following a rousing rendition of the National Anthem by the Century (High School) Singers, President Nick Archuleta, NEA Director Brenda Seehafer and Executive Director Chad Oban gave their opening remarks on the state of our union. All three reflected on the extraordinary challenges that we all have had to face, and emphasized how our members have always risen, together as the state's top champion of great public education and great public services, to meet these obstacles.

This year's featured guest speaker, NEA Foundation President Sara Sneed, then gave an inspiring speech on the state of the world, and how National Education Association members can utilize

assistance from their organization in order to stand firm in our beliefs and push back against those who oppose strong public education and services in our nation. "At the NEA Foundation, we are here to partner with you, not simply with words but through action, investment and unwavering solidarity," Sneed said.

New Business Items involving special assessment payments to the NDU Foundation, Disaster Fund reallocation and approving a referral campaign for any voucher bills that might pass during this year's legislative session were approved. Fortunately, the last two voucher bills were defeated in the closing days of session, but NDU stands ready for any challenges to come in that arena.

President Archuleta, Vice President for Education Alicia Bata, and Vice President for Public Employees Gary Feist were all re-elected for another term in office, and Kala Christensen was elected to serve as NEA Director, replacing Seehafer as she is finishing her final term in that role.



**Nick Archuleta**



**Brenda Seehafer**



**Sara Sneed**





North Dakota United members respond positively to a speaker at the 2025 NDU Delegate Assembly in Bismarck.

### 2026 NDU Delegate Assembly & NEA Representative Assembly

The 2026 NDU Delegate Assembly is scheduled for Saturday, April 18, 2026, at the Radisson in Bismarck. Local delegate allocation and registration information will be sent to local presidents by email in early February.

The 2026 NEA Representative Assembly will be held July 3-7 in Denver, Colo. There are 14 positions open for NEA RA state delegates. Election of NEA RA delegates will be held by an every-member ballot. For more information or to request

a petition for NEA RA delegate, contact Jill Miller at [jill.miller@ndunited.org](mailto:jill.miller@ndunited.org).

Nominating petitions require 50 signatures of active members and must be returned by Feb. 18, 2026. Active members include all NDU membership categories except K-12 substitute members, Retired, and Aspiring Educator members. The retired and aspiring educator officers are elected by their constituencies.

NDU President Nick Archuleta, standing, moderates a panel on school vouchers at Delegate Assembly. Speakers on the panel were, from left: Amy De Kok, NDSBA executive director; Chad Oban, NDU executive director; and Aimee Copas, NDCEL executive director.



## Thank You, Local Presidents

A heartfelt thank you to all of our local presidents! Our local presidents give their time and energy constantly to make sure our local unions are united and continue to lift up the needs of our members and our communities. Whether you are new to the role or have been in the leadership of your local for years, thank you.

— Nick Archuleta, North Dakota United President

### North Dakota Local Education Association Presidents:

Anamoose: Karissa Gahner  
Apple Creek: Amy Klein  
Ashely: Tucker Meidinger  
Barnes County North: Krista Amann  
Beach: Loni Thilmony  
Belcourt: Annadine Rendon  
Belfield: Ericka Hutzenbiler  
Beulah: Rebecca Huss  
Billings County: Erika Honeyman  
Bismarck: David Augustadt  
Bottineau: Anne Moun  
Bowbells: Cyle Golde  
Bowman County: Amanda Rafferty  
Burke Central: Alison Howatt  
Carrington: Teresa Pierson  
Carson: Kayla Tatro  
Center-Stanton: Brooke Boeshans  
Central Cass: Jenna Akers  
Central Valley: Tait Simonson  
Dakota Prairie: Tyrell Rose  
Des Lacs United: Angela Froseth  
Devils Lake: Courtney Klein  
Dickinson: Caralee Heiser  
Divide County: Rhonda Weathers  
Drake: Joan Birdsell  
Drayton: Matthew Rarick  
Dunseith: Michael Grant  
East Fairview: Jessica Bieber  
ECCFEC: Megan Thompson  
Edgeley: Laura Mielke  
Elgin-New Leipzig: Nola Roth  
Ellendale: Ashli Rall  
Emerado: Maria Draper  
Enderlin: Judith Krueger

Fairmount: Ashely Rutkowski  
Fargo: Laura Christensen  
Fessenden-Bowdon: Vanessa Becvar  
Flasher: Vicki Krenz  
Fort Totten: Daniel Willert  
Fort Yates: Lisa Lunde  
Gackle-Streeter: Tina Nitschke  
Garrison: Brittany Larson  
Garrison: Carrie Magandy  
Glen Ullin: Naomi Silbernagel  
Glenburn: Kaylee Olafson  
Grafton: Kristeen Monson  
Grand Forks: Brady Olson  
Grenora: Aaron Rudingen  
Griggs County: Carissa Mehus  
GST Multidistrict: Anna Syvreson  
Hankinson: Kari Hubrig  
Harvey: Alicia Olson  
Hatton: Christopher Strand  
Hazelton-Moffit-Braddock: Heather Nieuwsma  
Hazen: Elise Weir  
Hebron: Stephanie Heck  
Hettinger: Sarah Skogen  
Hillsboro: Hayleigh Lautt  
Hillsboro: Amber Podoll  
Hope-Page: Angel Lindseth  
James River Special Ed: Amanda Cook  
Jamestown: Cody Mickelson  
Kenmare: Courtney Halverson  
Kensal: Mackenzie Kleese  
Kidder County: Lindsey Steiger  
Killdeer: Nathan Horgeshimer  
Kindred: Tanya Neumiller

## Thank You, Local Presidents

Lakota: Ben Scallon  
Lamoure: Kallie Lehr  
Langdon Area: Mindi Lill  
Langdon Area: Josh Preble  
Larimore: Sarah Berger  
Leeds: Renae Fafard  
Lewis & Clark: Stephanie Asmundson  
Lidgerwood: Marissa Motschenbacher  
Linton: Rhea Flyberg  
Lisbon: Emily Olson  
Litchville-Marion: Linda Christensen  
Maddock: Elisa Kallenbach  
Mandan: Alexis Rasset  
Mandaree: Tye McNair  
Manvel: Carley Dub  
Maple Valley: Diana Kuznia  
Mapleton: Skyler Fosse  
Mapleton: Emily Haley  
Mapleton: Jennifer Helland  
Max: Mickenzie Watts  
May-Port CG: Eric Hanson  
McClusky-Goodrich: Roberta Netzloff  
Medina: Tamara Heinrich  
Midkota: Brooke Quam-Mistic  
Midway: Ashely Sailer  
Milnor: Nicholas Foertsch  
Minnewaukan: Tammy Widmer  
Minot: Peggy Morris  
Minto: Stephanie Kirkeby  
Montpelier: Maureen Schrader  
Mott-Regent: Jennifer Greff  
Munich: Darby Hart  
Napoleon: Brian Schneider  
Nedrose: Becky Schweitzer  
New Rockford-Sheyenne: Kent Brown  
New Town: Jackie Wollschlager  
Newburg United: Kaitlyn Troxel  
North Border: Marcia Halldorson  
North Sargent: Elizabeth LeQuire  
North Star: Jim Greenlee  
Northern Cass: Lyndsey Swanson  
Oakes: Ryan Schneider  
Oliver-Mercer Sp Ed: Misty Iverson  
Parshall: Angela Krueger

Pingree-Buchanan: Carrie Wolsky  
Ray: Ashley Elsworth  
Richardton-Taylor: Chelsea Christensen  
Richland: Terra Myhre  
Rolette: Megan Gilje  
Rolla: Brenda Seehafer  
Rugby: Kari Hill  
Rural Cass Co Multi: Julie Almquist  
Sargent Central: Jerry Fawcett  
Sawyer: Jennifer Hayes  
Sheyenne Valley Sp Ed: Katie Sather  
Solen: Deborah Roberts  
South Heart: Joshua Tormaschy  
South Prairie: Jodi Pederson  
South Valley Multi: Paul Fitzgerald  
St John: Arren St. Vincent  
Stanley: Kendra Evensvold  
Starkweather: Rebecca Kingsley  
Strasburg: Brian Grove  
Surrey: Kelsey Vetter  
TGU: Jessica Kongsle  
Theodore Jamerson: Amy DeWitt  
Thompson: Wendy Jordheim  
Tioga: Ryan Eraas  
Trenton: Chris Lind  
Turtle Lake-Mercer: Anita Laib  
UND: Elizabeth Legerski  
Underwood: Brenda Schantz  
Upper Valley Sp Ed: Andrea Cota  
Valley City: Sarah Lerud  
Valley-Edinburg: Kathleen Houser  
Velva: Candice Lemer  
Wahpeton: Grace Brandt  
Warwick: Natasha Sailor  
Washburn: Tracy Jaeger  
Watford City: Pamela Moen  
West Fargo: Matthew Montonye  
Westhope: Casey Mills  
White Shield: Karen Heinzen  
Williston: Rachel Anderson  
Wilton: Heidi Quinn  
Wing: Jeanette Fox  
Wishek: Lisa Hendrickson  
Wyndmere: Trudi Glynn

## Advocacy: Year in Review

**Advocacy is one of the primary benefits provided to the members of North Dakota United. With more than 11,000 total members, representing working professionals in public education and services, retired workers, aspiring educators and community allies, we are capable of making a lot of noise in the political arena and public discourse on our state's direction for the future.**

In 2025, that potential was fully on display throughout the entire year — but was especially noticeable during the opening months when the 69th North Dakota Legislative Assembly was taking place. We went into the session with a game plan, knowing full well that attacks were coming, as well as opportunities for positive, productive changes to state and local policies that matter most to our members and the students, families and communities they serve.

Here is a brief rundown of the biggest wins our members were able to achieve by working together during the legislative session, and some impressive stats on how we were able to affect these outcomes:

### Defeated SB 2307 - Library Censorship

SB 2307 was this session's iteration of a book ban, introduced by Sen. Keith Boehm. It would have criminalized librarians, required books considered "obscene" or "explicit" be placed in a location inaccessible to minors, and allowed any person from any state to challenge books in our libraries. After passing through the House and Senate, Gov. Kelly Armstrong vetoed the bill. SB 2307 was then returned to the Senate, where the veto was sustained.

### Weakened Anti-Tenure Bill, HB 1437

HB 1437, which started as a ban on tenure at 2-year institutions, was amended to alter tenure and post-tenure review and signed by Governor Armstrong. The Governor took action in response to the over 100 emails sent to his office by NDU members and supporters. SB 2003, the higher

ed funding bill, was amended to strike out language in HB 1437 prescribing the makeup of a "culminating post-tenure evaluation committee" and add due process protections to post-tenure evaluation. In the final version of SB 2003, the culminating committee language was added back in while due-process protections remained.

### Passed Lifetime Teaching Licensure Bill, HB 1238

During the 2023 session, members in Fargo worked to introduce a bill that would have lowered the years required for a lifetime teacher licensure from 30 to 20. Although that bill was defeated, there was another chance this year as Rep. Ista introduced the same bill that was defeated previously. Originally, HB 1238 also lowered the requirement to 20 years, but after some debate and amendments in the committee process, the bill passed with a 25-year requirement, and Governor Armstrong signed it into law.

#### Lifetime Teaching Licensure Bill Signing







**Special  
Education  
Study  
Bill Signing**

### **Passed Special Education Study Bill, HB 1530**

A bill that came about because of the work of our members, HB 1530 provides for a legislative management study on the circumstances and needs of special education teachers and the related special education teacher shortage. It was passed and signed by the Governor without significant opposition. ND United members in the Special Ed Collective worked tirelessly to address this important issue and get this bill passed.

### **Actions Taken: 4,788**

We had 4,788 people take action after receiving an Action Alert during the 2025 North Dakota legislative session.

- 1,652 ND United members
- 3,136 community supporters and allies of public education and public service

### **Emails sent: 28,000+**

NDU members continued to advocate through emails to their legislators as bills moved through the legislative process. Many also shared our Action Alert links with their networks through social media and other channels. Because of this, we had over 28,000 emails sent through our system. While this number is impressive, we know there were additional emails sent directly that aren't included in this count, so the real number is likely higher.

### **Testimonies Submitted: 347**

Our members made a huge impact through submitting 347 online testimonies in support of or

opposition to bills when they were in their respective policy committees. Because of the limited time allowed for submitting testimony, this was an especially impressive feat.

### **Lobby Day Attendees: 50+**

North Dakota United brought more than 50 members to the Capitol for two Lobby Day events, where members had the chance to tell legislators the real problems facing North Dakota's classrooms.

### **Media Stories: 60**

NDU made waves in local media as well. "North Dakota United" was mentioned, and President Nick Archuleta or one of our members was quoted in at least 60 unique stories this legislative session. That's an average of one story every other day.

### **Letters to the Editor: 48**

NDU members made a powerful impact this legislative session and that was reflected by attention in the media. Newspapers across North Dakota published dozens of letters from our members: 48 letters from NDU members were published at least 103 times.

Many letters appeared in multiple newspapers, ensuring our message was heard around the state. Of the 103 published instances:

- 70 opposed voucher bills
- 12 supported free universal school meals
- 9 opposed banning books
- 12 addressed other critical legislative issues

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### **Voucher Schemes Defeated — Again**

In many ways, 2025 felt like the Year of the Educational Voucher at the North Dakota Legislature. Lawmakers introduced not one, not two, but SIX voucher bills that would send public dollars to private schools. Add to that a new governor with an open mind for vouchers against the backdrop of a nation filled with states embracing voucher schemes, and for many in the world of North Dakota educational policy, the beginning of the 2025 legislative session felt like the proverbial final hurdle for voucher supporters.

Publicly funded private schools felt almost inevitable — not a matter of if the Legislature would pass a voucher bill but when. And yet, in December 2025 — at the end of the supposed Year of the Educational Voucher — North Dakota's public dollars are still not being siphoned off to fund private education.

This is the story of how all of us — the members of North Dakota United — and others who care deeply about public education defeated vouchers in

North Dakota's 69th Legislative Assembly.

Vouchers are unpopular in our state, and it makes sense why they would be. Intuitively, most of us understand it doesn't make sense to divert funding from the public schools that serve more than 90 percent of North Dakota's students to private schools.

Many of us are familiar with anecdotes from states that have passed universal vouchers, where voucher recipients have used public dollars to pay for big screen TVs, or kayaks, or horseback riding lessons (as in Iowa). Or that voucher programs have ballooned to overwhelm a state's education budget (as in Arizona), hurting students at public schools. Or that the vast majority of students who attend private schools in states with voucher programs never attended a public school in the first place. Or that private schools in states with voucher programs tend to increase their budget by almost exactly the amount as the educational voucher offered by public dollars.

And most of us understand that public schools are the bedrock of many rural towns — when the school closes, the town dies. And we love our small towns in North Dakota. So, it's no surprise vouchers are unpopular.

For these reasons and many others, voucher proponents no longer refer to them as "vouchers." Instead, they use focus group-approved terms, like "school choice," and refer to vouchers





**More than 50 members of NDU took part in Lobby Day activities at the state Capitol during the 2025 legislative session.**

as “education savings accounts” or “ESAs.” But North Dakotans know that any program that sends public dollars to private schools is an educational voucher. “A rose by any other name,” and so forth. And for many reasons – including all of those listed above – we know vouchers are bad for public education.

Instead of embracing one of the six voucher “solutions” proposed by lawmakers, thousands of North Dakotans (including, and especially ND United members) stood up for their public schools. Several voucher bills failed in committee, all but dooming their chances on the floor. But HB 1540 (introduced by Rep. Ben Koppelman, R-West Fargo) and SB 2400 (introduced by Sen. Michelle Axtman, R-Bismarck) were both passed out of their chambers of origin.

HB 1540 was narrowly approved by both chambers but vetoed by Gov. Kelly Armstrong, who said he believed it would have been folly to do so, as the bill would easily have been overturned by a referral campaign. He had a good reason for that suspicion — in the span of just a few days after it passed the Senate, he received notes, messages and phone calls from thousands of constituents — many of them NDU members — asking him to veto the bill.

Instead, Armstrong promoted SB 2400, which he felt would be more palatable

to the general public (SB 2400 included lesser payments for students in public education, as well as private education, which could be spent on educational expenses. Privately educated students would have received significantly more money).

SB 2400 was defeated in the House of Representatives by a vote of 14 to 78 for a wide variety of reasons. Pro-public education politicians voted against it for obvious reasons; lawmakers with libertarian tendencies voted against it because constituents who elect to homeschool their children said it was the first step toward what they called unfair regulations dictating how they could educate their children. And even voucher advocates voted against it because it included funding for public school families — money that they believed should have been reserved solely for private school families.

So, as of December 2025, there are no private school vouchers on the books. Ultimately, 2025 was not the Year of the Educational Voucher, but the year the educational voucher was defeated – again and again. It was the year thousands of North Dakotans stood up for the beating hearts of their communities — their public schools. It was the year that NDU members demonstrated that they will always stand up to lead the fight against private school vouchers, again and again, if we must.



**North Dakota United**  
301 N 4th St  
Bismarck, ND 58501-4020



# UNITED VOICES

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# MENTOR