

UNITED VOICES

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Join Us for



2026 Delegate Assembly Saturday, April 18 | Bismarck

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THREE FINALISTS
FOR ESP OF YEAR

UNITED FOR
SCHOOL MEALS

COURAGE &
COMMUNITY

PODCAST PD
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United for School Meals

Every school day across North Dakota, thousands of students walk into classrooms carrying more than backpacks and books. Many also carry the burden of wondering whether they will have enough to eat that day. Hunger has no place in our classrooms, and ensuring every child has access to nutritious meals at school is one of the simplest, most effective ways we can support student success.

That's why North Dakota United proudly supports [Together for School Meals](#) and the proposed constitutional measure that would make the state of North Dakota responsible for providing universal school meals for all students.

In North Dakota, we rightly have compulsory education laws that require our young people to attend school or be homeschooled. As I've mentioned ad nauseam, schools do not charge families for school-issued tablets, books or computers, or to participate in field experiences. The reason is that we recognize these things as necessary components of a well-rounded education. School meals are equally important.

Research and everyday experience tell us that students learn better when they are well-nourished. When students have reliable access to breakfast and lunch at school, they are more focused, more engaged and better prepared to succeed academically. Teachers and education support professionals see the



By Nick Archuleta
ND United President

difference every day in classrooms across our state.

But this measure offers other benefits. If North Dakota voters approve this amendment, families could save more than \$1,000 per student each year. At a time when families are facing rising costs for groceries, housing, childcare, fuel, and health and auto insurance, keeping that money in their pockets provides meaningful help with the affordability challenges every household is experiencing. Universal school meals would allow parents to redirect those savings toward other essential expenses while knowing their children are receiving healthy meals at school.

This proposal also reflects something deeper about North Dakota values. It recognizes that investing in our children is one of the most important responsibilities we share as a state. That would explain why polling consistently shows that roughly 80 percent of North Dakotans support universal school meals. That level of

Continued on page 5.

Are You Prepared?

With the state recently coming forward with a new voluntary separation incentive program, a common discussion in the office where I work has been: “When are you retiring?”

Seventeen state agencies have opted into the program. The agencies participating will need to pay for the program out of their own budget, and there is the expectation that the agency will experience savings by leaving the position open for a period of time or hiring a new employee at a lower cost.

Most state agencies have struggled to recruit and retain staff, so I’m not surprised by the relatively low number of agencies participating. Employees should have a good understanding of their health and retirement benefits and the options available to them.

The North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System (NDPERS) defined-benefit main plan has three tiers providing different retirement dates and multipliers.

- Tier one (hired prior to 2016) — offers early retirement at age 55 with a 6% reduction and a rule of 85 (age and years of service) or 65 with a 2% multiplier.
- Tier two (hired Jan. 1, 2016 – Dec. 31, 2019) — offers early retirement at 55 with an 8% reduction and a rule of 90 with minimum age of 60 or age 65 with a 2% multiplier.



By Gary Feist
NDU Vice President
for Public Employees

- Tier three, hired Jan. 1, 2020, or after — early retirement at 55 with 8% reduction and a rule of 90 with a minimum age of 60 or age 65 with a multiplier of 1.75%.

The three tiers do not provide employees with inflationary adjustments, so your pension will remain constant throughout your retirement years. Without an inflation adjustment, a retiree’s spending power will decrease over their lifetime. The defined-benefit plan provides an employee with a modest retirement and should be supplemented with Social Security and the employee’s personal savings. Without inflation adjustments, one way you can increase your retirement income is to make contributions to a 457 deferred-compensation plan or 403(b) plan. The NDPERS plan allows contributions as low as \$50 per month and with the Portability Enhancement Provision (PEP), employees will be transferring up to 4% of the state’s

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United for School Meals

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agreement is rare in today's political environment, and it speaks to the simple truth that caring for our children is something that unites us. Passing this constitutional measure will also create opportunities for broader public engagement about the future of our schools and public services. When voters come together to support students and their families in this way, it opens the door to larger conversations about strengthening public education, investing in the educators and public service employees who support our communities, and ensuring that North Dakota continues to provide high-quality public services for generations to come.

North Dakota has always taken pride in looking out for our neighbors and building strong communities. Ensuring that every student has access to healthy meals at school continues that tradition. By passing the school meals amendment, we can support student success, provide meaningful financial relief for families, and demonstrate once again that North Dakota believes in investing in its future. And as I have said many times, we, as a society, do not do anything more important than educating our future. Let's do this! Thank you for your great work in service to our neighbors across the state, and thank you for your membership in ND United!

Are You Prepared?

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contribution to the employee's retirement bucket. The money in the employee's retirement bucket belongs to the employee, providing transferability should you choose to leave employment with the state or your political subdivision. The balance in your retirement bucket can also be used to purchase service credit to help you meet your rule or to increase your years of service, which will increase your monthly pension payment. Contributions to your deferred-compensation plan over a period of years will increase your savings and provide you with options as you approach retirement.

Prior to January 2026, only pre-tax contributions were available for NDPERS deferred-compensation plans. Starting in January 2026, employees can now choose to make contributions pre-tax (which lowers taxable income) or post tax through a Roth IRA where the earnings are tax free upon withdrawal.

[The NDPERS website](#) is a great resource to learn about your retirement benefits and the options available to you. Run an estimate to see your monthly retirement benefit based on assumptions you provide. Be prepared for the life you want to live after your working career.

With Pride & Courage

Dr. Bridget Brooks inspired
by colleagues to stand up
for LGBTQ+ community

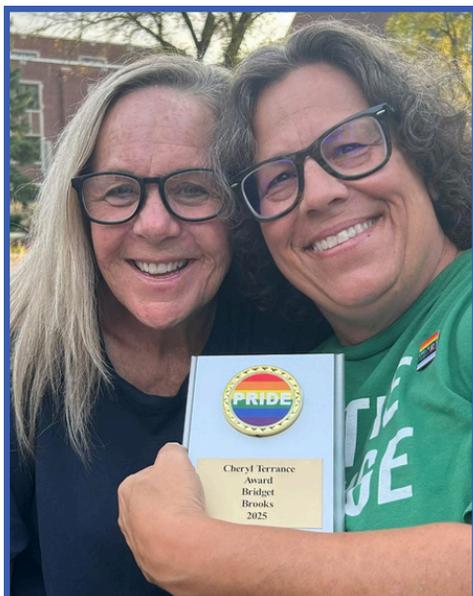
By Kelly Hagen

NDU Communications Director

In these often-divisive times, it can probably feel easier — and safer — to hide away our true selves from those who would judge us negatively for daring to be different. It takes an outrageous amount of courage to boldly stand out from the mainstream and stand up for others, who — like you — who are being persecuted for being true to themselves.

Dr. Bridget Brooks, an instructional designer for the University of North Dakota's Teaching Transformation and Development Academy and active member of UND United, vividly remembers the moment when the courage of her colleagues emboldened her to step up for herself and for others.

"I'd been a UND employee in a couple of different ways, and when I came back at this position, I was looking at the website and seeing things that had changed across campus," Brooks said. "One of those things was the (Faculty



UND instructional designer Bridget Brooks, right, and her wife, Jody Little, stand together for a photo on campus with the Cheryl Torrence award. (Submitted photo)

and Staff) OUTlist. There is an OUTlist on the UND website where staff and faculty have said, 'Hey, you can share my name and my picture, so that people know that I am out.'"

That was kind of overwhelming for me. So, I sat at my new desk, and the tears just started flowing down my face like, wow, this is huge ... just looking at those faculty and staff that had the courage to say, 'Hey, you know what, I'm gay, I'm a member of UND's staff, and I'm going to put my name out here.'"

From that moment, Brooks was inspired to be bold and give back to her community at UND. And so, she and her wife, Jody, brainstormed and came up with the idea of establishing

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an endowment to support UND's Pride Center, which is the only LGBTQ+ center at an institution of higher learning in the state.

"Anybody can go into the Pride Center," Brooks said. "It's not just inclusive if you're a member of the LGBTQ community – it's there for everybody. If you're an ally, you can go into that space and you can take part in the in the programming and those kinds of things. You don't even have to be a UND student because it's a public institution. You can go in there and you can spend time in that welcoming space."

The couple approached the UND Alumni Association to set up the LGBTQ+ Endowment, and guaranteed \$25,000 in donations within five years, or they would personally pay whatever difference they couldn't raise. They have already surpassed that goal in a little over one year, and now the new milestone is to raise \$100,000 within five years.

Brooks said she feels incredibly grateful to everyone who has helped them to make the endowment successful so quickly, including the expert help of the Alumni Association and all of their donors.

"Their kindness has been overwhelming at times," she said.

"This is our future, and UND is so blessed to have a Pride Center on campus, so I just think it's important to keep getting the word out there to get the donations."

In recognition for all the amazing work that Bridget has done within the LGBTQ+ community, she was selected as both this year's winner of the

**To donate to the UND
LGBTQ+ Endowment,
please go to:**

pd.UNDalumni.org/give-und-lgbtq

Cheryl Terrance Award and as grand marshal for the first-ever Grand Forks Pride Parade. When asked what these honors meant to her personally, she said it was huge because of how much Terrance — a longtime UND psychology professor and dedicated faculty advisor to the campus 10% Society — meant to her as a friend and ally.

"She just did so much that she didn't have to do, and she took time with people and accepted them for who they were and always took the time to make you feel included."

Brooks says that, if asked for advice or guidance from anyone out there, from any background, race, culture, gender or identity, who wants to help but has been made to feel powerless or alone, she would offer them this one word: courage.

"For many years, I might have been alone in standing up and speaking my mind," she said. "But when you stand up and have courage, it gives other people courage, too."

"I wrote the word 'courage' on a piece of paper and put it in my office window. You'd be surprised — when you stand up, people see it, and they want to stand with you. ... Even me standing up and saying, 'Hey, I'm gay, but I'm also a person,' can bring change."

Finalists Named for ESP of the Year

*Winner to be announced
at Delegate Assembly*

Education Support Professionals (ESPs) are the backbone of our public schools in North Dakota. Without these dedicated individuals — from paraprofessionals and administrative staff to custodians, food service workers and beyond — our schools simply wouldn't function the way our students need them to.

As we have done in recent years, three finalists for the 2027 North Dakota United ESP of the Year were selected from nominations submitted late last year, each representing the care, commitment and quiet leadership ESPs bring to their work every day. All three were honored at celebrations held in their school communities.

On the following pages of *United Voices*, we're proud to share highlights from their nominations, offering a closer look at the impact they have on students, colleagues and their communities. Photos and videos from each celebration are available at ndunited.org/united-voices.

This year's North Dakota United ESP of the Year will be announced at Delegate Assembly in Bismarck on April 18.



Laurie Holcomb

Grand Forks



Dawn Ressler

Mandan



Katie Weiner

Thompson



Laurie Holcomb



Laurie Holcomb is an excellent leader in our school who advocates for

students and support staff alike. She goes above and beyond in her work and is a leader among paras not just at South, but district-wide.

She is an amazing educator and mentor who has spent countless hours not only teaching students but also helping train new paras. Her decades of experience and devotion to education shine through in everything she does. She is a leader in the community and her commitment to her work

Position: Program Para — Special Education

Workplace: South Middle School — Grand Forks

Local: Grand Forks Education Association

extends beyond just the school day. She is the person paras at our school go to for any questions about the job or how they can advocate for themselves.

Ms. Holcomb is the perfect example of a community leader and devoted educator, putting her all into the students she supports as well as keeping a keen eye out for other students who may be struggling and supporting them as well.

She is an incredibly humble person, she has a remarkable story, grit and resilience, she never gives up, and she gives hope when others are feeling despair.



Dawn Ressler

Position: Physical Therapy Assistant

Workplace: Mandan Public School District

Local: Mandan Education Association



Dawn Ressler has demonstrated a significant and multi-faceted

impact across our school and professional community. Dawn directly supports students and families by consistently creating fun, effective activities that seamlessly incorporate Physical Therapy (P.T.) principles into learning and play. This commitment extends into the community through their initiative to personally build and distribute comprehensive summer kits designed to provide essential enrichment and materials for children during the extended break, supporting sustained growth and bridging the school-

to-home connection. On a professional level, she is a tireless leader and resource for their peers, known for being always willing to assist colleagues in any capacity needed. Their commitment to the profession is further evidenced by their long service as a dedicated Building Representative, serving on School Board Committees and her consistent participation in ESP conferences, ensuring the professional voice and development needs of support staff are represented and championed at the local and state levels. Dawn is an amazing person and strong advocate for MEA's ESPs and our students.



Katie Weiner

Position: Instructional
Para

Workplace: Thompson
Public School District

Local: Thompson Education
Association



Katie Weiner is willing to help in any role needed in our school. She fills in as

a sub when needed, works one on one with students to help monitor progress and reteach skills, and cares about each and every student. She shows interest in the students' lives and impacts them and their families by greeting them with a friendly smile and making them feel special. She helps families through her time and effort that she devotes to helping students become successful at skills they were lacking or struggling with. I have never seen Katie frustrated, even though she is sometimes pulled in

many directions during a single day. She is a wonderful example of what a great paraprofessional is.



Katie is an amazing person. Having her as a part of our staff is a true blessing.

She truly cares about everybody. She is willing to help with anything and everything to make our school not just function but thrive on a daily basis. The students LOVE her. She gets the best out of every student that she works with daily. Katie is simply awesome! I truly cannot imagine our school without her! She makes Thompson Public School a great place to work, learn, play, etc.



Saturday, April 18 | Bismarck

On Saturday, April 18, 2026, this year's North Dakota United Delegate Assembly will be held at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Bismarck. Every year's Delegate Assembly is centrally important in charting the course for our union. This year will be no different, as our members are given the great opportunity and responsibility to share in the governance decisions of our statewide union of public employees and educators, meet and network with their colleagues and fellow NDU members from across the state, and choose our state's delegates to the National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assembly (RA), to be held on July 3-7, 2026, in Denver, Colo.

When & Where

The NDU Delegate Assembly will convene at the Radisson Hotel (605 E Broadway Ave.) in Bismarck on Saturday, April 18, at 8:30 a.m. At the Assembly, members will participate in the governance decisions of NDU, select delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly, reignite old friendships, meet new people, and hear from national, state and local leaders on issues important to all ND United members.

Delegate Report Form

Any member of ND United — including preK-12 teachers & education support professionals (ESP), higher education faculty &

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staff, public employees, aspiring educators and retired members — is eligible to attend and participate in our annual Delegate Assembly. Each local is guaranteed at least one representative. Larger locals are allowed one (1) per 50 members — check with your local leadership for the exact number of delegates you're allowed to send and to inquire if you can serve as a delegate. Local/chapter presidents have received their Delegate Report Form, and it must be returned to NDU no later than April 2, 2026. More information, including the agenda, will be sent to delegates when we receive your local's Delegate Report Form.

Friday Night Social

Another great social is being planned, so please attend! Come join your colleagues from around the state, relax and have fun! It will be held on Friday, April 17, at 7 p.m., in the iberty/Manhattan Room at the Radisson Hotel, 605 E Broadway Ave., in Bismarck.

Expenses

Recognizing the importance of participation at the state delegate assembly, NDU will provide the following expense assistance to locals or chapters (not individuals):

- IRS standard business mileage rate for one car for every 4 delegates (ex: 1-4 delegates = mileage for 1 vehicle; 5-8 delegates = mileage for 2 vehicles; 9-12 delegates = mileage for 3 vehicles)
- One-half of the cost of a double room at the DA hotel for each delegate (if necessary)
- \$25 for each registered delegate. In addition, NDU will be responsible for breakfast and lunch on the day of the assembly. (Vouchers will be available at registration.)

Questions?

Please contact Lisa Bennett at lisa.bennett@ndunited.org or 701-223-0450.

NDU President Nick Archuleta, standing, moderates a panel on school vouchers at the 2025 Delegate Assembly. Speakers on the panel were, from left: Aimee Copas, NDCEL executive director; Chad Oban, NDU executive director; and Amy DeKok, NDSBA executive director.



Delegate Assembly



Participants at the 2024 Delegate Assembly listen to featured speaker Princess Moss, vice president of the National Education Association.

FAQ: What do you need to know about being a delegate to DA?

What is the NDU Delegate Assembly?

The ND United Delegate Assembly is — in the most practical sense — democracy in action. Each year, members come together in one place to meet, coordinate efforts and chart a course for the year ahead.

Why does the Delegate Assembly matter to me as a member?

ND United is driven by its members. Delegate Assembly is your chance to speak up and help shape how we grow our voice and impact across the state.

What kinds of decisions are made at Delegate Assembly?

Delegates elect state officers to three-year terms and vote on key business items — including resolutions, bylaws and other decisions that shape our union's direction.

What do delegates gain from the experience?

Delegates leave with a deeper

understanding of how our union works, stronger connections with fellow members, and the confidence that comes from being part of something bigger than themselves.

Who can serve as a delegate?

Any member in good standing is eligible to serve as a delegate. Each local is allocated delegates based on membership size, and your local president can guide you on how many spots are available. If you're interested, simply reach out and ask how to get involved.

Do I need experience or a leadership role to be a delegate?

Definitely not. Serving as a delegate is a great entry point for members who want to get more involved. If you've ever thought about stepping into leadership or becoming more active in your union, Delegate Assembly is a perfect place to start.

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Why should someone like me consider serving?

We have a saying at North Dakota United: “You are the ‘U’ in NDU.” What that means is this — you’re the essential element that makes everything work. You’re the union. We are the union. And we need all of you to bring your voice, your ideas and your perspective to help move us forward.

What actually happens during Delegate Assembly?

Delegates gather to discuss and vote on key issues, hear updates on union priorities, and connect with members from across the state. It’s a mix of business, collaboration and shared purpose — all focused on strengthening our union.

What is it like to participate as a delegate for the first time?

Most first-time delegates are surprised by how welcoming it feels. There’s a lot to take in, but you won’t be on your own — experienced delegates and staff are there to help guide you. You’ll quickly find your footing.

Will I be expected to speak publicly in front of everyone?

Only if you want to. Some delegates choose to speak or ask questions during floor sessions, while others prefer to listen and learn. Both are valuable. There’s no pressure — just an opportunity to participate in the way that feels right to you.

What opportunities are there to connect with other members?

Delegate Assembly brings together members from across North Dakota who share similar values and goals. It’s a rare opportunity to connect, exchange ideas and build relationships that last beyond the event.

How can I become a delegate this year?

Start by reaching out to your local president or leadership team. They can walk you through the process and help you get signed up. If you’re even a little curious, that’s your first step. If you don’t know who your local leaders are, you can contact our office at 701-223-0450 or comments@ndunited.org, or simply ask a colleague who is also a member.



Delegate Assembly

While Delegate Assembly is where the business of our union gets done, it's also a chance to step back, learn and be inspired. Each year, we invite guest speakers from across North Dakota and the country to share their experiences, insights and ideas — all rooted in a common goal of strengthening public education and the communities we serve. Here's a look at who will be joining us this year.

Kennedy DeLap

Miss North Dakota 2025



Kennedy DeLap was crowned Miss North Dakota 2025 last June. Since then, she has been traveling the state as an ambassador

for North Dakota and speaking to groups about nurturing communities and helping them thrive. She shares her message of the impact of character and acts of service. She was born in the Jamestown area but has lived in Bismarck for many years. She is a graduate of Bismarck Century High School and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in journalism and a Master of Arts degree in environmental science and natural resource journalism from the University of Montana. Kennedy was appointed by Governor Armstrong as an Ambassador for Character Education. She currently works as a photographer and writer for North Dakota Living magazine.

Nathan Eklund

Vital Network

Nathan Eklund, M.Ed, is a champion for educator well-being and retention, and he brings a national



voice to the vital conversation on burnout and creating thriving environments for adults in schools. As founder and CEO of Vital Network, Nathan collaborates closely with state leaders to develop systemic interventions that make schools not just functional but truly inspiring places to teach and lead.

A former high school English teacher, Nathan's commitment to elevating the teaching profession began with his 12 years in the classroom.

Frannie Tunseth

2026 ND Teacher of the Year



Frannie Tunseth, the 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year, is a middle school math and language arts teacher and interventionist

for grades 6–8 at May-Port CG Public Schools in Mayville. She holds a Bachelor of Science in elementary education with a minor in special

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education from the University of North Dakota, as well as an educational leadership certificate from the University of Mary in Bismarck. Tunseth is currently pursuing a doctorate in teaching and leading at the University of North Dakota, and her dissertation, “Acting Within Context: A Case Study on Teacher Agency in a Rural School,” examines how teachers make purposeful decisions in complex educational settings. Tunseth’s teaching is deeply grounded in relationships and community. She mentors pre-service teachers at UND, leads inquiry-based professional development in rural schools and partners with families to design meaningful, equitable learning experiences. In her classroom, she combines interactive, experiential learning with individualized support, guiding students to engage deeply with challenging content, develop critical thinking skills and take ownership of their learning, all while recognizing and celebrating each student’s unique strengths and perspectives.

Rebecca Fricke

ND Public Employees Retirement System



Rebecca Fricke serves as the executive director of the North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System,

bringing more than 30 years of experience in member services, policy, and benefit administration. She shares her expertise nationally as a member of the State & Local Government Benefits Association Board and was honored as the organization’s 2022 Benefits Manager of the Year.

In addition to her work with NDPERS, Rebecca contributes to the Bismarck Cancer Center Advisory Board and is an active member of North Dakota United, with strong ties to the public education community.

Lisa Johnson

ND University System



Lisa Johnson is the deputy commissioner for academic and student affairs for the North Dakota University System.

Her work is concentrated on program approval, policy and procedures, articulation, and academic matters that directly affect student success, health, and well-being. She serves as the University System’s liaison to councils, task forces, internal and external advisory groups, legislators, and several collaborative interagency partnerships.

Lisa began her undergraduate studies at Minot State University while serving in the United States Air Force. She completed associate, bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the College of Business at Minot State University.

Delegate Assembly

Jessica Edland

Together for School Meals



Jessica Edland serves as campaign manager for the Together for School Meals ballot measure campaign,

leading strategy, coalition outreach and partnerships with organizations across North Dakota working to ensure every student has access to breakfast and lunch at school for no cost. She brings more than 17 years of experience helping nonprofits and issue campaigns build strong community support and sustainable funding. Jessica previously served in the ND House of Representatives and worked as membership director for the North Dakota Farmers Union.

Erin Oban

North Dakotans for Public Schools



Erin Oban is a lifelong North Dakotan, daughter of farm family, and proud “Class B” kid from Ray, ND. Her professional

career has included experience as a middle school math teacher, in non-profit management and educational leadership, and in politics, advocacy, and public service at the legislative

and federal levels.

In 2014 and 2018, Erin was elected to represent District 35 in the state Senate. Throughout her legislative service, Erin was a champion for public education, an advocate for working families, and a voice for those underrepresented in positions of power and influence. In 2022, she accepted an appointment from President Joe Biden to serve as state director of USDA Rural Development, a federal agency providing financial resources and technical assistance to strengthen rural and Tribal communities, a position she held through January 2025.

Jason Brunner-Burns

National Education Association



Jason Brunner-Burns is a devoted advocate for educators and families who has spent over a decade at the NEA

strengthening public education across the Midwest. As Midwest regional director, he’s served as a steady partner to 13 state affiliates, guiding executive director searches, and designing campaigns that won over 2 billion dollars in new revenue for public education. Jason mentors state affiliate managers and staff, builds resilient coalitions, and treats every challenge as an opportunity to safeguard and advance both the labor movement and public education.

Get to know the four candidates who are seeking to represent North Dakota United on the national stage, as delegates to the 2026 National Education Association (NEA) Representative Assembly the summer in Denver, Colo.

Alicia Bata

NEA RA Candidate



Alicia D. Bata teaches for the Valley-Edinburg school district on interactive television to high school students in Edinburg,

Park River and Grafton schools. She was elected and served as the NEA Director for ND for two terms. She was appointed by NEA's president to serve on the Human and Civil Rights Committee in Washington, D.C., also for two terms. She was selected to participate in the Magna Carta Human Rights Project by NEA, in conjunction with the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in England. She was voted by her peers on the NEA Board to be a delegate representing the U.S. at the World Congress of Education in South Africa. Bata is a national trainer on the NEA Cultural Competence team. Bata was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her first university degree was as a literary English/Spanish translator (Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires). She received her Bachelor of Arts degree, teaching certificate, ESL/Bilingual endorsement, and Master of Science degree in Education with a cognate in Bilingual Education from the University of North Dakota. She is married to a ND farmer, Bill, and has four children and six grandchildren.

Dawn Hintz

NEA RA Candidate



Dawn Hintz has been at Bismarck High School since 1996, teaching mathematics. Her husband, Dave, works for Carestream Health and

maintains X-ray equipment. Their daughter, Amanda, graduated from NDSU in Ag Business and recently was married. They also have a son, Cameron, who is in his fourth year at BSC for Cyber Security and works full-time at Bobcat. They are "empty nesters" except for the two dogs that run the household.

Hintz has been a member of NEA since she was a senior at Minot State University in 1992. Both of her parents were teachers. She was the local secretary at a school in Eureka, Nev., I have been a building rep for BHS for the last five years and have served as Bismarck's treasurer for the last year. On the state level, she has served on the resolutions committee for the last three years.

She was honored to be an ND rep at the NEA RA for the last four years now. The first RA she attended was in Chicago in 2022. Now, she said, she knows who is on the ND delegation and they have been able to work together for what is good for ND and what is good for education.

Delegate Assembly

Angel Lindseth
NEA RA Candidate



Angel Lindseth serves on the North Dakota United Board as the K–12 Less than 600 Director, representing educators and

advocating for strong rural schools across the state. She is also president of the Hope–Page Education Association, where she serves as lead negotiator, and president of the North Dakota School Counselor Association. Her passion is leading and representing teachers and school counselors across North Dakota. Angel is a K–12 school counselor at the Hope–Page School District in eastern North Dakota, where she is dedicated to supporting students’ academic success, social-emotional growth, and postsecondary planning. She has proudly represented North Dakota educators at the NEA RA in Orlando, Philadelphia and Portland, and looks forward to attending Denver this summer. She values the opportunity to serve in the RA’s governing body, ensuring educator voices are heard in shaping school safety, funding, and education policy. Angel earned her bachelor’s degrees in Elementary Education and Psychology from Valley City State University and her master’s degree in School Counseling from the University of Mary. Angel and her husband live in Page.

Brenda Seehafer
NEA RA Candidate



Brenda Seehafer is an elementary Title I teacher from Rolla, where she has been teaching for the last 23 years. She previously

taught at Wolford and also worked at the UND Lake Region College Library. Seehafer has a degree in Elementary Education from Minot State University. She is currently the NDU Foundation president, where she fulfills many duties and works closely with NDU staff on many aspects of the grant and scholarship program. She serves NDU on the UPAC Committee, the Resolutions Committee and is a member of the Advocacy “A” Team. During the last legislative session, she also served as a political member organizer for NDU. She is a former NEA Director from North Dakota and formerly served on the NDU Board of Directors. Brenda is currently on the NEA RA Transformation workforce committee, which is a committee that was appointed by NEA President Becky Pringle. She is also a facilitator for online book studies for NDU’s Professional Development department. She has been co-captain of the Political Action Committee representing ND since 2021. Brenda is also active at the local level. She is the Rolla Education Association president and is also a local bargainer.



Matt Liebel, a field consultant for North Dakota United, speaks during a meeting of the interim Special Education Funding Committee on March 4, 2026. (Photo by Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

Special education teachers express concerns in survey

By Michael Achterling
North Dakota Monitor

North Dakota special education teachers and paraprofessionals are reporting burnout, citing increased workload, safety concerns and low pay, according to a survey presented to lawmakers this week.

More than 150 North Dakota special education professionals [responded to the survey](#) conducted by North Dakota United, a union representing educators and public sector employees.

The survey resulted from the passage of [House Bill 1530](#) during the 2025 legislative session that commissioned a study to look at the needs of special education teachers and how to better retain them.

Educators brought up safety of students and staff during debate on the bill last year and during a Wednesday meeting of the Legislature's interim Special Education Funding Committee. One Mandan special education teacher said in submitted written testimony

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Feature Story

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she had been injured multiple times over the past 10 years with some incidents requiring trips to a medical clinic.

In the survey, about 44% of respondents said there are rarely options for taking paid leave if they're injured during a crisis at school.

"It's not very much fun when a teacher gets injured on the job and they are forced to take their own sick leave by something that happened when they were working," said Matt Liebel, a field consultant for North Dakota United.

Paraprofessionals also play a key role in special education by being present with students to assist them during coursework.

About 74% of respondents said pay and benefits for paraprofessionals rarely keep pace with the cost of living.

Jessica Van Winkle, a special education specialist in Bismarck Public Schools, told lawmakers she started as a paraprofessional in special education and would have stayed in that role if she could have earned enough to support her family. "There is something deeply impactful about being the consistent adult sitting next to a child or young adult who needs support," Van Winkle said. "But like many paraeducators, I had to think about how to provide for my family long term."

She said paraprofessionals are among the lowest paid employees in school districts and include some who are on government assistance programs.

"They support students with complex disabilities that may require nurse-



Jessica Van Winkle, a special education specialist in Bismarck Public Schools, speaks during a meeting of the interim Special Education Funding Committee on March 4, 2026. (Photo by Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

level knowledge, behavioral challenges that are more therapeutic in nature and academic needs," Van Winkle said. "They should not be expected to carry professional instructional responsibilities without professional pay, preparation and protection."

About 86% report they feel overwhelmed by their special education workload, and 44% report they are considering leaving special education.

"I've had colleagues leave special education, leave teaching all together, because those duties just got to be too much and they kind of got burnt out and done with it," said Nathan Horgeshimer, a 15-year special education teacher from Killdeer.

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Horgheshimer said one option to help special educators was to have scheduled paperwork days where a substitute could teach while the primary educator and caseload manager completes the required paperwork. He also suggested having scheduled time during the school day to coordinate and hold meetings with students and parents on their child's individual education program instead of those meetings occurring outside of school hours.

Rep. Eric Murphy, R-Grand Forks, said the survey's use of the word "rarely" as a response instead of more definitive terms, such as "never" or "always," leaves the data muddled and open to interpretation.

North Dakota United [recommended](#) to lawmakers that funding to special education units should be increased statewide to promote retention of special education staff.

"Without structural changes to time allocations, staffing levels and compensation practices, burnout and retention challenges are likely to continue," said Amber Haskell, a field consultant for ND United.

Rep. Karla Rose Hanson, D-Fargo, said she knows from her own family's experience that the challenges mentioned by special educators are not new.

"A special ed teacher can make all the difference in the world for a student," Hanson said. "We need to make sure that we're properly empowering them to do the best they can."

It may not be the job of lawmakers to dictate how much funding needs to be used on special education in each school district, said Sen. Michelle



Nathan Horgheshimer, a 15-year special education teacher from Killdeer, speaks during a meeting of the interim Special Education Funding Committee on March 4, 2026. (Photo by Michael Achterling/North Dakota Monitor)

Axtman, R-Bismarck and vice chair of the committee.

"I trust that our districts, and those closest to those students and teachers, know best on exactly how the funding should flow to the special education units," Axtman said. She added, if the lawmakers do begin to dictate how that funding is used, it then becomes the Legislature's problem to address the issue for all school districts.

Rep. David Richter, R-Williston, chair of the committee, said lawmakers are still gathering information and it was too early to determine if the committee will make a recommendation to the full Legislature on special education funding.

"We can do everything from nothing to a complete overhaul and anything in between," Richter said. "I don't even want to speculate."

Get professional development **ON THE GO**

Level up at your
own pace with
Podcast PD



By Joel Crane
NDU Press Secretary

Traditional professional development – like book studies or in-services – have their advantages, but sometimes educators with busy lives need more flexibility. That’s why North Dakota United offers [Podcast PD](#) – an effective way for educators to earn up to five PD credits per year. Andrea Weikum is an AVID elective teacher at Horizon Middle School in Bismarck. She says she loves that Podcast PD is so personalized to her interests. “During any type of PD that we’re given in the schools, oftentimes teachers can get annoyed because it’s something that somebody else picked,” Weikum said. “Whereas the Podcast PD is 110% personalized to exactly what we need as teachers. We can look



“Podcast PD is 110% personalized to exactly what we need as teachers.”

Andrea Weikum,
AVID elective teacher

through hundreds of options for episodes and pick what’s relevant to what we need to make us successful in our classrooms.” Educators can choose from any episode of one of the following seven podcasts to listen to and write a reflection paper about.

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- [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](#)

Seven reflection papers equal one credit, and participants can earn up to five credits using Podcast PD.

NDU members have found the wide breadth of knowledge from real educators in the hundreds of available podcast episodes has impacted their classroom, both in broad strokes with how they understand their professional practice and in their day-to-day teaching.

Tracy Boyle, a high school special education teacher at Central Cass, says listening to podcasts hosted by special ed teachers have her thinking about important things she needs to know, but that she doesn't use every day in her classroom.

"I listened to the podcast on special education. It's a special ed teacher who does the podcast, and some of the episodes I listened to were more of the legal side of things, which I found interesting because I don't always deal with special ed law," said Boyle.

On the other hand, Boyle said she has learned a lot, like the "junk drawer analogy" she got from a guest on the Truth for Teachers podcast, where kids have to make connections to their learning with everyday objects. "My kids had to pick something out of our junk drawer and compare it to what we were doing in class. And, oh my gosh, we laughed so hard and had



"When you give kids a chance and do weird things that they think are fun, they usually rise to the occasion."

Tracy Boyle,
special ed teacher

so much fun," she said. "One was a sponge. They said they had to sponge up all the information and then use that information to wipe on everybody else's brain. When you give kids a chance and do weird things that they think are fun, they usually rise to the occasion."

And of course, perhaps the biggest draw about Podcast PD: you choose how you listen.

"It was super convenient. I could do it at my own time: while I'm getting ready, to and from work, while I'm working out, during my lunch. With the book studies, you have to dedicate more time to reading. Not that they're any different or bad, it's just feels a little bit different. But yeah, Podcast PD is way more convenient," said Weikum.

Sign up for Podcast PD at courses.ndunited.org.



Teachers of Tomorrow

Through its affiliation with North Dakota United, the National Education Association and NEA Aspiring Educator Program, the Student-NDU (SNDU) group provides college students with assistance, mentorship and professional resources. Our NDU Foundation partnered with SNDU this year to help fund events on the Bismarck campuses of Dickinson State University and United Tribes Technical College to promote membership, and scholarships and grants.

Dickinson State University — Paint, Connect & Join SEA

The Student Education Association (SEA) chapter for Dickinson Education Association hosted a guided painting party, designed to engage current students and recruit new SEA members in a relaxed, creative setting. The event was led by their elementary art professor, who guided participants step-by-step through a fun painting experience — no prior art experience required!

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During the event, chapter leaders shared information about SEA/SNDU membership benefits and ND United Foundation scholarships, including application timelines and how membership supports future educators. SEA advisor Marisa Riesinger, an assistant professor of elementary education, said 10 students were in attendance.



UTTC SNDU — Meet and Mingle: PD and Scholarships

The SNDU chapter at United Tribes Technical College held a social event in order to reach a larger number of students in the Elementary Education and Health, Physical Education and Recreation (HPER) programs. They said that hosting an event was “a unique opportunity to invite and engage with students in the HPER degree as they have not been as informed about SNDU as the EDU students.” At the gathering, attendees were served food, learned about SNDU, ND United and scholarships that are available to members through the NDU Foundation, and a drawing was held to cover the cost of two memberships.

A Hunger for Change

*ND United part of coalition
collecting signatures for a
vote on school meals*

By Joel Crane
NDU Press Secretary

The North Dakota State Legislature convened for a three-day special session in January 2026. At the end of the session, Governor Kelly Armstrong signed a budget and four bills. Notably missing from the list of new laws was HB 1624: a North Dakota United-endorsed bill that would have provided breakfast and lunch to all K-12 students in North Dakota, at no cost to the student or their parent or guardian. The bill would have cost \$65 million for its first year.

ND United President Nick Archuleta testified in favor of bill while it was considered in committee. “Universal school meals are not just about nutrition,” Archuleta wrote in his President’s Post e-newsletter, “They are about affordability and economic stability for working families. For many households, paying for school breakfast and lunch adds up to as much as \$1,500 per child each year. Passing the universal meals amendment allows families to keep more of their hard-earned money in their pockets, easing monthly budgets and reducing financial stress.”



Unfortunately, HB 1624 was defeated by the ND State Senate by a vote of 24-22 after passing in the House of Representatives by a vote of 55-38. Lawmakers who supported the bill made several arguments in favor of its passage. Some cited affordability: the bill would save families nearly \$1,000 per student every school year. Others noted that recent polls (including [from NDU](#)) indicate that it is overwhelmingly popular, boasting approximately 80% favorability among eligible voters. Still others said they were only voting for it so the language of the bill would be put into North Dakota Century Code, rather than the North Dakota Constitution (more on that later). Others simply said they were voting for it because they believe it’s the right thing to do.

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Lawmakers who opposed the legislation erroneously said the legislation originated with out-of-state interests and that the bill would have placed an undue burden on rural schools.

Together for School Meals

The sponsors of HB 1624 said they drafted their bill in response to the ballot measure initiative run by the Together for School Meals coalition, which would place a nearly identical constitutional ballot measure on the ballot for the public to decide.

There are two differences between the proposed ballot measure and HB 1624: the first is that the proposed ballot measure would be a constitutional measure. That means, if the ballot measure is approved for the ballot and

passed by voters, it will be amended to the North Dakota Constitution and would be difficult to remove or change. On the other hand, HB 1624 would have been placed in North Dakota Century Code, which means future legislative assemblies could adjust the law. The second difference is that the universal school meals provided for in HB 1624 would have begun in the fall of 2026; conversely, if the proposed ballot measure becomes law, universal school meals would begin in the fall of 2027. North Dakota United is a proud member of the Together for School Meals coalition. At the time of writing, signature gatherers are still circulating petitions and are planning to place the measure on the November 2026 ballot.

Join the Advocacy Team



Scan to register for May 7 meeting.

The foremost benefit of your membership in North Dakota United is your combined power of advocacy and your collective voice. Advocacy can happen anywhere, from the classroom to the Capitol to anywhere decisions are being made, and we are here to help find opportunities for you to advocate and provide the tools and resources to be successful. We know getting started can feel intimidating, but change only happens when we step up and get involved. And you don't have to do it alone! NDU invites you to join us for the [Spring meeting of the ND United Advocacy Team](#) — formerly known as the GROW Team — taking place on May 7 at 6 p.m. CDT. Building on our recent victories, we are expanding our advocacy work in preparation for the fights ahead. Every position our union takes, every action we lobby behind is

based on all of us doing what's right for the highly qualified public educators and employees in North Dakota.

With the 2026 elections starting soon and the 2027 legislative session on the horizon, it's more important than ever for our members to be prepared for what's to come. Beyond our current work supporting the universal school meals ballot measure, we know there will be more to fight for in 2027: salary increases for public sector employees, protection of tenure rights in higher education and preventing the privatization of public schools. Whether you've been actively involved for years or are simply interested in learning more, there's a place for you on the NDU Advocacy Team! Our staff and experienced advocacy leaders are here to support you every step of the way.

Let's build power together and make our voices heard!





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