

UNITED VOICES

SUMMER 2026

VOL. 12, NO. 4

The official member publication of North Dakota United



Dawn Ressler

2027 ESP of the Year



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United Voices is the official member publication of North Dakota United (NDU), and affiliate of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers. It is published three times per year, in March, June and September, and sent electronically to members. A special issue, *Year in Review*, is printed and mailed to members in December. Postmaster: Send address changes by mail to North Dakota United, 301 N Fourth St, Bismarck, ND 58501.

Thank You for Another Great Year

As another academic year has drawn to a close, I wanted to take the opportunity to recognize the extraordinary commitment of North Dakota's educators and public service professionals. From kindergarten classrooms to college lecture halls, from school offices and cafeterias to bus routes and maintenance departments, our members have once again demonstrated what it means to serve with professionalism, compassion and resilience. This year, once again, demanded much from all of us, and North Dakota United members delivered. Educators continued to meet students where they are, academically and socially, while navigating growing expectations and increasing pressures. Higher education faculty and staff worked tirelessly to prepare students for the future while defending the value and mission of public higher education and their institutions. Across every level of public service, our members showed up each day because they believe in the promise of strong public institutions and strong communities. As I mentioned in my remarks at the 2026 NDU Delegate Assembly in April, the work you do matters. It changes lives. It strengthens families. It creates opportunity. And it remains an



By Nick Archuleta
ND United President

imperative asset as North Dakota builds a bright future for all of us. But while we celebrate the year that was, we must also recognize the work ahead.

Public education and public services do not succeed by accident. They succeed because people are willing to stand up, speak out and advocate for what our students, families, and communities need and deserve. The months ahead will require all of us to stay engaged and organized.

That means supporting candidates — regardless of their political affiliation — who believe in public education, respect our public employees and understand the importance of investing in our communities.

Elections matter because most of the decisions that directly affect our classrooms, campuses, workplaces and students are decisions made in Washington, D.C., or Bismarck, ND. It also means working tirelessly to pass Measure 3 — the Universal School Meals measure — in November. Measure 3 is our

Continued on page 5.

Starting New Life Chapters

May you be proud of the work you have done, the person you are and the difference you have made. It's spring! Time for new beginnings, and time for life changes.

As I write this, many across the state are getting ready for graduation, and some are getting ready to retire. As with all major life changes, retirement comes with preparation. Put joining North Dakota United-Retired on your preparation list.

NDU-Retired is over 1,600 members strong. Our members come from public education, public service and healthcare, among others. We aspire to improve key federal and state programs, traditional pensions, and healthcare coverage for current and future retirees. We want to help to affect positive change, not only for our members but for North Dakota's children, public educators, public employees and communities. In short, we want to continue to support the professions we left.

Together with the lobbying team at NDU, NDU-Retired members work to meet the needs of retired education and public service employees. We work to protect and improve retirement pension and health benefits including state pensions, Social Security and Medicare. We strive to improve public education



By Toni Gumeringer
NDU-Retired President

through mentoring, literacy, and intergenerational programs and activities. We strive to achieve legislative and political action goals for public education and public service.

NDU-Retired provides its members with a wide range of benefits, including:

- The NEA Educators' Liability Insurance Program, which covers retired members who substitute teach on a day-to-day basis
- Insurance programs, including life, dental and vision, Medicare supplements, long-term care and pet health
- Everyday savings on online shopping, flowers and gourmet gifts, warehouse club memberships, cell phone service, magazine subscriptions and hearing aid programs
- Home and auto insurance and discounts
- Travel discounts on vacations and tours, car rentals and hotels

Continued on next page.

Thank You for Another Great Year

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opportunity to make a lasting investment in students and working families across North Dakota. When students are fed, they are better prepared to learn, participate and succeed. Measure 3 represents our shared value of strengthening families in that it allows parents to keep \$1,000 per student in their pockets.

And perhaps most importantly, we must continue telling our stories. No one can better explain the importance of public education and public services than the people doing the work every day. When educators and public employees share their experiences, the public sees the

dedication, expertise, and humanity behind the headlines and political rhetoric. Conversations with neighbors, letters to the editor, social media posts, and community engagement all help build understanding and trust. Our collective voice remains our greatest strength. So, let's invite our colleagues who are not yet members to join ND United.

For everything you have given this year to your students, your colleagues, your institutions and your communities, I thank you. Your work matters more than ever. Thank you, too, for your membership in our union, ND United!

Starting New Chapters

Continued from previous page

- North Dakota United's publications, including *United Voices* and our UV-Retired newsletter
- Attendance at NDU conferences and NDU Delegate Assembly.

In order to engage and connect with our members across the state, we have been holding the NDU-Retired Book Club for the past couple years. We meet via Zoom about once a month to discuss the book we are reading. It is a great way to connect, engage your mind and share a good

book. For more information, [click here](#).

As you start a new chapter in your life (or before you retire — pre-retired membership is a great option) please remember it's okay to give up your career, but never give up on your profession. Continue to support efforts to make life secure for yourself and those who are still working in your profession. Help support public education and public services. Be a member of NDU-Retired and enjoy your retirement.

The Power of Play



2027 ESP of the Year keeps things fun while teaching life skills

By Kelly Hagen
NDU Communications Director

“Let’s go play!”

For Dawn Ressler, a physical therapy assistant for Mandan Public Schools and North Dakota United’s 2027 Education Support Professional of the Year, those three words are often used as a greeting, a preview of the day’s lesson plan, and her own personal philosophy for helping students succeed.

Whether she’s helping a student carry a lunch tray, sit independently, move safely through school or build the coordination needed to catch, throw, jump and skip in physical education, Ressler believes therapy works best when students are having fun.



“We don’t say, ‘Let’s go work,’” Ressler said. “We say, ‘Let’s go play.’”

By approaching therapy through play, Ressler helps students discover that movement, confidence and learning can happen together.

She intentionally begins with activities students can accomplish before gradually increasing the challenge, allowing early success to build confidence for more difficult skills.

“You’re here because this is hard,” Ressler will tell her students. “If it wasn’t hard, you wouldn’t need me.”



That same philosophy extends beyond her work with students.

Colleagues across Mandan Public Schools describe Ressler as someone who is always willing to step in wherever she's needed. In nominating her for ESP of the Year, Mandan Education Association President Alexis Rasset wrote, "On a professional level, she is a tireless leader and resource for her peers, known for being always willing to assist colleagues in any capacity needed."

Whether filling in as a paraeducator, helping in understaffed classrooms, assisting on field trips or simply providing another set of hands, Ressler doesn't hesitate to help.

"If I see that they're short-staffed or if they're doing a project and they could use extra hands, I just flit in where I'm needed," she said. "Often, a teacher just looks at me and says, 'I gotta go to the bathroom.'"

Sometimes, the most important thing is just being the human in the room."

That spirit of service also carries into her union involvement. Ressler has served as a building representative for Mandan Education Association, attended North Dakota United ESP conferences and professional development events, and advocates



for education support professionals during legislative sessions.

"People don't always understand what ESPs do," Ressler said. "A lot of times, people don't know who I am in the district unless their kid is with them, and their kid tells them what I do."

Yet perhaps the greatest affirmation of her work comes not from awards, but from the students whose lives she's touched.

"Sometimes kids are just glad to see my face when they're at a new school," Ressler said. "They're scared. 'I saw you at my other school.' Seeing that familiar face helps them."

Moments like those remind Ressler that even the smallest acts of kindness and encouragement leave a lasting impression.

"I guess people notice what you do," she said, "and you don't even know they're noticing."

Confidence Builder

ESPoY finalist Holcomb is go-to person at school

When colleagues at South Middle School in Grand Forks describe Laurie Holcomb, they all say the same thing: She's the person everyone turns to when they need a helping hand.

Holcomb, a special education paraprofessional with decades of experience, was recognized as a finalist for the 2027 North Dakota United Education Support Professional of the Year award. During a school celebration, colleagues praised her as a mentor, problem-solver and advocate whose influence extends beyond her own classroom.

"She is the person paras at our school go to for any questions about the job," one nominator wrote. "Ms. Holcomb is the perfect example of a community leader and devoted educator."

Associate Principal Brian Loe called Holcomb "the ultimate professional," noting that she is often the first person new paraprofessionals shadow as they learn the job. Another colleague, Brenna Page, described her as "battle-hardened," explaining that her schedule often takes her to more than a dozen classrooms each day, wherever students need extra support. For Holcomb, however, the greatest rewards come from the students.

"I love watching them grow," she said.



"You see kids struggle and struggle, and then all of a sudden that lightbulb moment happens. To know you had even a small part in building that confidence — that's why I do this every day."

One recent encounter reminded her just how meaningful that work can be. At a reunion for her former middle school, a former student sought her out to thank her, telling Holcomb that the encouragement and guidance she received years earlier had changed the course of her life.

"It's something I'll never forget," Holcomb said.

Holcomb also hopes recognition like the ESP of the Year program shines a brighter light on the important work paraprofessionals do every day.

"People don't always understand what paraprofessionals do," she said. "We're educators, mentors, problem solvers and advocates for students."

Whether she's supporting students through difficult moments, mentoring new colleagues or simply offering a fresh start each day, Holcomb's focus remains unchanged.

"The kids are the reason I'm here," she said. "They're the reason I do this."

A New Day, Every Day

ESPoY finalist Weiner loves to see smiles on kids' faces

Walk through the halls of Thompson Elementary School, and you'll quickly notice something about instructional paraprofessional Katie Weiner: the students notice her, too.

During a recent celebration recognizing Weiner as a finalist for the 2027 North Dakota United Education Support Professional of the Year Award, school leaders asked students to stand if they had chosen Mrs. Weiner as one of their trusted adults during the school's Sources of Strength program. Dozens of children rose to their feet — a fitting tribute to someone whose impact reaches far beyond the classroom.

Colleagues describe Weiner as someone who is always ready to step into whatever role the school needs.

"Katie is willing to help in any role needed in our school," one nominator wrote. "She fills in as a substitute when needed, works one-on-one with students, and cares about each and every student."

Another added, "The students LOVE her. She gets the best out of every student that she works with daily."

For Weiner, helping students feel seen is where every day begins.

"I like to make sure that I see smiles on their faces," she said. "If there's



not one, we make sure to fix that. We want to start our day off the best we can, and whatever we need to do to make that happen is what we do."

No two days look the same. While Weiner has a regular schedule, she's equally likely to provide one-on-one support, assist with behavioral or social-emotional needs, fill in wherever she's needed or respond when another staff member calls for help.

"I'm just kind of on call," she said with a laugh. "It makes my day very exciting. It's a new day, every day."

The moments that stay with her most are watching students recognize their own growth.

"When we can show them where they started and where they are now, the light bulb goes off," Weiner said.

"They realize, 'Wow, I'm doing it.' That's why I do what I do."

Asked what she loves most about being a paraprofessional, Weiner didn't hesitate.

"What do I not love?" she said. "Every day, I love coming to work. It's not a chore — it's something I want to do."



From left, Rep. Dave Rustebakke, Sen. Randy Lemm, 2026 ND Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth and Rep. Mike Beltz, stand together in Tunseth's classroom at MayPort C-G Middle School. (Photo by Sarah Grossbauer/ND United)

Seat at the Table

ND Teacher of the Year Invites Lawmakers to School

By Frannie Tunseth

2026 ND Teacher of the Year

For a long time, I quietly believed my impact as a teacher began and ended within the four walls of my classroom. Like so many educators, I poured everything I had into my students each day, trusting that the work I was doing would eventually speak for itself. I stayed focused on my lessons, my students and the day-to-day moments that make up life in a classroom.

But then something shifted.

Being named the 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year did not just

change my title. It changed my lens. It gave me a platform, yes, but more than that, it gave me perspective.

I began to understand that advocacy is not something reserved for people with formal titles or seats at decision-making tables. Advocacy belongs to educators, too. We are the ones who see it all — the breakthroughs, the struggles and the quiet wins no one else witnesses. If we do not tell those stories, they can be misunderstood, rewritten or lost altogether.

That realization settled in slowly, but it became the spark that led me to do something that felt both important and deeply uncomfortable.

I invited legislators into my classroom.

I will not pretend it felt easy.

Reaching out to lawmakers in the middle of a full school year felt like trying to carve space into something already overflowing. Emails were sent and left unanswered. Schedules did not align. Time slipped past in the way it always does in education. More than once, I considered letting it go, not because I did not believe in it, but because it would have been simpler not to push.

But I kept coming back to something I shared in a recent speech at the ND United Delegate Assembly about “the table.” Too often in education, we think of the table as somewhere we have to be invited, as if our place there depends on someone else pulling out a chair for us.

But the truth is, educators are the table.

We are where those decisions land every single day. We live them, we shape them and we carry their impact into our classrooms. That is why our voices are not optional. They are essential, and they deserve to be shared.

So, I kept reaching out.

And then it happened.

On the day of the visit, our classroom held a kind of energy that is hard to put into words. Students gathered in a circle for a Socratic Seminar, a conversation designed not for answers but for thinking. A Socratic Seminar is a space where every voice carries equal weight, where students listen not to respond but to understand, and where ideas are built



“Too often in education, we think of the table as somewhere we have to be invited, as if our place there depends on someone else pulling out a chair for us.”

Frannie Tunseth,
May-Port CG Public School
reading and math teacher

together through curiosity, questioning, and respectful challenge. It is, at its core, a shared space for thinking out loud and growing together.

The focus of our conversation was timely and meaningful. We explored a topic already surfacing in discussions around the 2027 legislative session: limiting screen time in schools.

When Senator Lemm, Representative Beltz, and Representative Rustebakke entered the room, something shifted. They did not take seats of authority at the front of the room. Instead, they pulled up chairs, joined the circle, and became part of the conversation.

Continued on next page.

Member Voices



From left, Rep. Dave Rustebakke, Sen. Randy D. Lemm, 2026 ND Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth and Rep. Mike Beltz stand together in Tunseth's classroom at May-Port CG Middle School. (Photo by Sarah Grossbauer/ND United)

Continued from previous page.

They listened. Really listened. They asked thoughtful questions and leaned into student responses with genuine curiosity rather than agenda. And in that circle, something powerful happened.

The room softened in the way it does when people feel truly heard. Students spoke with honesty and courage. Ideas were not performed. They were offered, shaped and expanded, together. For a moment, the usual boundaries between student and policymaker dissolved into something simpler and more human. We were just people trying to understand one another.

Later, I heard each of the legislators reflect on how impactful it was to hear directly from students. Not summaries of student voice. Not interpretations of it. The real thing.

Honest, thoughtful and grounded in lived experience. That distinction matters more than we often acknowledge. Too often, students are spoken about rather than spoken with. That day, they were undeniably heard.

More than anything, the experience reminded me that we are all on the same team: Team Kid.

What stayed with me most was not the structure of the lesson or even the topic itself. It was the quiet realization that was happening across my classroom on that day.

I watched students recognize, sometimes for the first time, that their voices carried weight beyond the walls of our room.

I watched them sit a little taller. Speak a little braver. Trust that what they had to say mattered right now — not just someday in the future.



TOP LEFT: Sen. Randy Lemm listens to a student.
TOP RIGHT: Rep. Dave Rustebakke listens as another student speaks.
LOWER RIGHT: Rep. Mike Beltz listening during a classroom visit to May-Port CG Middle School.

(Photos by Cole Short/Hillsboro Banner)

And I wanted them to carry this with them always. Their voices matter because they matter.

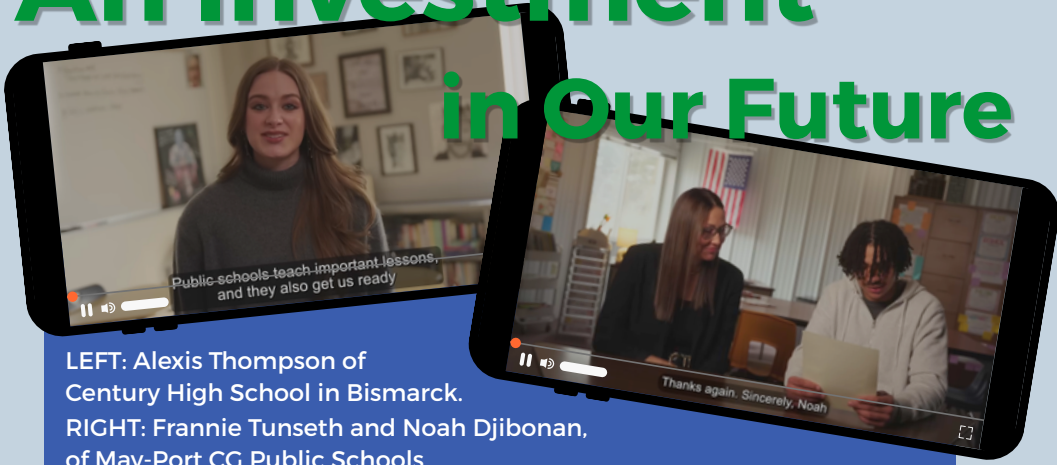
Public schools are full of moments like this. Quiet, powerful, ordinary miracles that rarely make headlines but shape everything. They are filled with compassion, curiosity, resilience and brilliance that deserve to be witnessed firsthand. No report or statistic can fully capture what it feels like to sit in a circle of learners and hear them think out loud together.

I am deeply grateful to Senator Lemm,

Representative Beltz, and Representative Rustebakke for taking the time to step into that space with us, to listen with openness, and to engage so thoughtfully with our students. Their presence mattered more than they may ever fully know.

And to fellow educators, I would simply say this: invite people in. Advocacy does not always look like standing behind a podium. Sometimes it simply looks like opening your classroom door and saying, “Come see what is happening here.”

An Investment in Our Future



LEFT: Alexis Thompson of Century High School in Bismarck.

RIGHT: Frannie Tunseth and Noah Djibonan, of May-Port CG Public Schools.

Ads promote great work of ND public schools

North Dakota United is a proud coalition member of North Dakotans for Public Schools (ND4PS), a grassroots organization whose purpose is to strengthen, protect and celebrate public schools in North Dakota. You might have seen the “We Love Our Public Schools” yard signs in communities around the state — those are from North Dakotans for Public Schools.

This spring, ND4PS received a grant to create a series of paid TV and digital advertisements that highlight the excellent work being done in our public schools every day. NDU’s communications and political staff has been working closely to create these ads and to get them out into the world.

Each ad features a student and an educator they’ve identified as having made an impact. The first features Century High School senior Alexis Thompson, an impressive young

person who plans to attend Barnard College in New York City in the fall. She writes a letter to her Advanced Placement 12 English Literature teacher, Karri Landeis:

Dear Mrs. Landeis,

You have a gift for recognizing students as individuals and cultivating the abilities we don’t yet see in ourselves. Alongside the success I’ve found in the classroom, I learned the importance of trusting my own voice. I’ve carried a sense of confidence and a commitment to intellectual growth into every opportunity I’ve pursued since.

Sincerely,
Alexis

A separate set of ads will feature 2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth and May-Port CG junior Noah Djibonon. Noah is a standout athlete, and between shots of them on the basketball court, he reads a note to Mrs. Tunseth that he wrote, in which he says — in part — the following words about the effect she has had on him over the years:

Our hope is that with these ads — and other efforts from North Dakotans for Public Schools — we can shift the discourse around public education.

Too often, a small minority of negative voices are amplified when they say destructive things about our public schools. North Dakotans for Public Schools hopes to inspire an air of positivity about the fantastic public

Mrs. Tunseth,

You have influenced me in many ways that you probably don't even realize. You set a good example for how to care for people, you've helped me understand that it's important who I choose as my friends, and you have helped me navigate difficult obstacles in my life. You are way more than just a teacher to me. You make me feel special, and my life without your mentorship would be so different.

Sincerely,
Noah

schools North Dakotans are so proud of, in order to influence positive change for K-12 education.

As we say in these ads, North Dakota's public schools are an investment in our future.





North Dakota Secretary of State staff do an initial count of petition signature packets at state Capitol in Bismarck, moments after they were filed by the Together for School Meals coalition. (Photos by Kelly Hagen/ND United)

School Meals Heads to a Vote

By Kelly Hagen
NDU Communications Director

A proposed constitutional amendment to provide free breakfast and lunch to all North Dakota students will appear on the November 2026 general election ballot after state officials verified that supporters collected enough valid signatures to qualify the measure.

The initiative, backed by the statewide [Together for School Meals](#) coalition, would ensure every student has access to one breakfast and one lunch each school day at no cost to families.

“It’s exciting to know that in just over 100 days, we didn’t just meet the

Editor’s Note: This article has been updated from its original April publication. Since petition signatures were submitted to the Secretary of State’s office, the measure has been certified for the November 2026 general election ballot. North Dakota voters will now decide whether to adopt universal school meals statewide.

requirements to be on the ballot — we exceeded them by more than 20,000 signatures,” said Amy Jacobson, executive director of [Prairie Action ND](#) and board member for Together for School Meals.



Speakers during a press conference that was held at the state Capitol in April were, from left, Amy Jacobson, Prairie Action ND; Robin Nelson, Together for School Meals chair; Michelle Wagner, ND School Nutrition Association; Ashley Gaschk, ND AFL-CIO president; and Cheryl Kary, Sacred Pipe Resource Center.

The group submitted 57,229 signatures to the Secretary of State's office during a press conference held in the Great Hall of the state Capitol in early April.

North Dakota United is one of seven organizations serving on the coalition's steering committee.

"ND United is proud to stand alongside our partners in Together for School Meals as we kick off the campaign to finally enact universal school meals," NDU President Nick Archuleta said in a statement. "This is not only good for kids facing food insecurity, but it also provides meaningful relief for hard-working families across North Dakota. When a family can keep \$1,000 per school-aged child in their pocket, that's real money they can use for other essential costs."

Michelle Wagner, legislative chair of the [North Dakota School Nutrition Association](#), highlighted the

educational and operational benefits of universal meals, including higher participation rates, improved student focus and engagement, and greater efficiency for school districts.

"This effort is about building a system that works for all kids—one that is consistent, efficient, and reflects the realities our schools and families face every day," Wagner said.

With the measure now certified for the November 2026 ballot, North Dakota voters will have the opportunity to decide whether universal school meals should become part of the state constitution.

Supporters argue the proposal would reduce food insecurity, improve student readiness to learn, and save families an estimated \$1,000 per child each year. Opponents are expected to raise questions about long-term costs and funding. The campaign will continue educating voters in the months leading up to Election Day.



Story and photos submitted by Leah Hamann/UTTC SEA advisor

Building Connections

UTTC student group helps members to learn, lead and serve

The Student Education Association (SEA) chapter of United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck stayed busy this past school year with a number of member events.

They hosted a Meet and Mingle event on March 11, where more than 20 aspiring educators representing the Elementary Education and Health, Physical Education, and Recreation programs of study learned about the benefits of Student North Dakota United (SNDU) membership, with a focus on scholarship opportunities.

Nick Archuleta, president of North Dakota United, joined the event and shared information about the organization and its support for future educators. Additionally, the college's Financial Aid office also participated in the event, providing students with valuable guidance on available financial aid resources,



reiterating scholarship opportunities, application procedures, and effective strategies for obtaining funding to support their academic success and future career aspirations.

To conclude the event, two attendees were awarded SNDU memberships through a random drawing.



A central goal of the Association is to cultivate a community of education professionals who are actively engaged at the college, local, state and national levels. Throughout the 2025–26 academic year, the chapter has participated in community-based family and school events, including opportunities to share their face painting skills.

In the fall, aspiring educators attended the National Indian Education Association Convention in Spokane, Wash., where they participated in sessions and networked with educators and administrators from across the country.

Within the Association, the Chapter also hosted several events aimed at building connections with new teacher education students, potential students interested in the field of education, and supporting professional development, including potlucks, volunteer activities, and an evening of painting at Theo Art School.



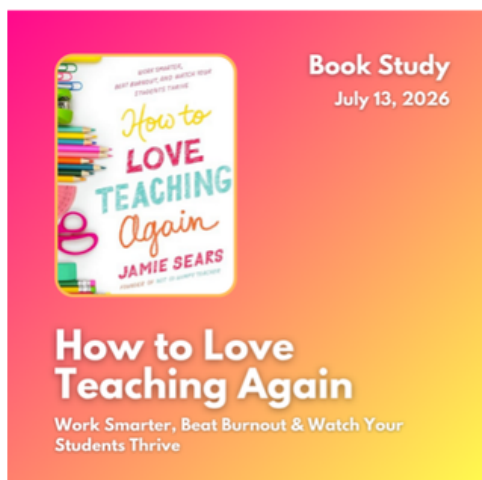
Summer Learning

Excellent professional development courses offered over break

North Dakota United continues to offer excellent professional development for educators across our state. In the 2025–2026 school year, we offered more than 60 book studies, hosted several retired member book studies, and offered a wide range of Podcast PD; we also delivered educator ethics and provided leadership opportunities to our local affiliates around the state.

Our professional development courses are tailored to our members' – and their students' – needs, and we hope to empower members to find solutions to help meet those needs. With every book study and Podcast PD offering, we aim to build an organizational culture of professionalism and reflective practice and support professional excellence across the career continuum.

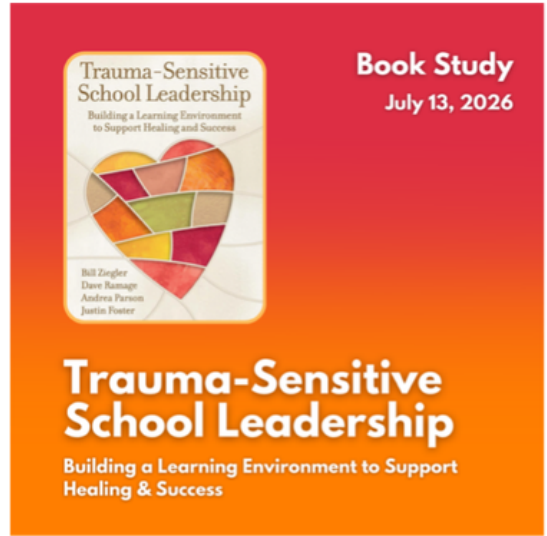
A quick glance at our upcoming course offerings for July 2026 reflects these



values. Take, for example, [“How to Love Teaching Again: Work Smarter, Beat Burnout & Watch Your Students Thrive,”](#) which begins on July 13, 2026. This book study provides strategies for educators to increase teacher fulfillment and improve student outcomes by drawing from the real-life struggles of educators.

This book study and others addressing educator burnout are geared toward our members so they can better serve their students.

Another offering intended to support professional excellence and prepare educational leaders to meet their students' needs is Trauma-Sensitive School Leadership, which begins on July 13, 2026. This book study is intended to assist administrators to develop empathetic and supportive relationships among students and staff.



Still time to sign up for Podcast PD, earn credits

Another professional development opportunity NDU is proud to offer is [Podcast PD](#). This is a hyper-personalized and convenient method of professional development. Participants are able to choose from hundreds of episodes of selected podcasts to tailor their learning to their professional interests.

How it works: Choose an episode from one of the podcasts below and complete a reflection paper for each episode. Seven episodes and reflections equal one credit, and you can earn up to five credits using this method.

- Teach Me, Teacher
- The Wired Teacher
- Angela Watson's Truth for Teachers
- Literacy Talks
- The Mel Robbins Podcast
- Stepping into Special Education



If you're reading this before July 2026, it's not too late to sign up for a round of courses — including the July book studies and Podcast PD — from the 2025-26 school year.

PD courses for the 2026-27 school year will begin in September 2026. Keep an eye out for the monthly UV+ PD Update e-newsletter to get more information.



TOP LEFT: Attendees at the 2026 NDU Delegate Assembly.
TOP RIGHT: NDU President Nick Archuleta presents opening remarks.
LOWER RIGHT: Miss ND Kennedy DeLap served as a featured speaker.

2026 Delegate Assembly Brings Members Together

On April 18, delegates representing North Dakota United locals and chapters from across the state gathered at the Radisson Hotel in Bismarck for the 2026 Delegate Assembly.

Delegates adopted a budget, strategic plan, legislative agenda and new business items while celebrating members making a difference.

“No matter where we work or what role we serve in, we share a common experience and a common purpose,” NDU President Nick Archuleta said in his opening remarks. “And that’s what brings us together as North Dakota United. We are educators in every sense of

the word. We are public servants in every corner of the state. We are the people who educate our future, keep our universities and colleges thriving and the vibrancy of our communities intact.”

Our 2026 list of guest speakers included: Miss North Dakota Kennedy DeLap; Erin Oban, of North Dakotans for Public Schools; Jessica Edland, of Together for School Meals; Lisa Johnson, deputy commissioner for the North Dakota University System; Nate Ecklund, of Vital Network; and Rebecca Fricke, executive director of the North Dakota Public Employees Retirement System.



TOP LEFT: Delegates listened as Miss North Dakota speaks.
 TOP RIGHT: Gary Rath awarded as Friend of the Foundation.
 LOWER ROW: Marie Snavelly spoke after being announced as the inaugural recipient of our Friend of the Foundation award.

NEA Director Kala Christensen and NDU Executive Director Chad Oban delivered reports on the state of public education and public services at the national and state levels.

Delegates reviewed progress on 2025 new business items, discussed an updated Strategic Plan centered on membership growth, advocacy and leadership development, received the 2027 legislative agenda and approved the union's budget for the coming year.

Brenda Seehafer, chair of the NDU Foundation, highlighted the Foundation's work over the past year

to support ND United members and their families by providing scholarships and financial assistance for education and professional development. She also surprised the first two-ever recipients of the new Friend of the Foundation awards: Marie Snavelly and Gary Rath.

Snavelly was honored first, for her years of service to North Dakota United and for helping establish and grow the NDU Foundation alongside her late husband, Les.

"When Brenda was reading off all those grants I got from various

Continued on next page.



TOP LEFT: Delegates raising hands for recognition at NDU DA.
TOP RIGHT: President Archuleta presents Dawn Ressler as 2027 NDU Education Support Professional of the Year.
LOWER LEFT: Ressler stands alongside the past three ESPs of the Year — Joan Hall, of Bismarck; Laurie Mahrer, of Mandan; and Bruce Schonberger, of Minot.
LOWER RIGHT: Bismarck delegate Tiffany Williams-Rice asks a question during discussion.

Continued from previous page.

entities, it opened my eyes to the good of the Foundation,” Snavelly said. “Because of my involvement in this lovely, lovely association, this union, North Dakota United, I knew where to go. I knew how to ask for help. I knew where the help was. And so, I cannot press upon you how important that is.”

Rath seemed especially surprised to receive the award after leading the effort to recognize Snavelly this year. Alongside Les Snavelly, the Foundation’s first board chair, Rath helped establish the NDU Foundation in his role as business manager for NDEA in 1991.

This year’s Delegate Assembly also recognized Mandan Public Schools physical therapy assistant Dawn Ressler as the 2027 Education Support Professional of the Year. Tribute video packages for all three finalists — which included Ressler, special ed para Laurie Holcomb of Grand Forks, and instructional para Katie Weiner, of Thompson — were shown before this year’s winner was announced and gave a speech.

“As ESPs, we do the best we can,” Ressler said in her remarks. “Sometimes our best isn’t enough because we don’t have the training. So I am very, very grateful for North Dakota United. They provide us with



TOP LEFT: Delegates participated in advocacy and leadership trainings during the afternoon.

TOP RIGHT: President Archuleta and Executive Director Chad Oban discuss a finer point of the day's agenda.

LOWER LEFT: Bismarck delegate Ellie Shockley speaks.

LOWER RIGHT: Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth delivered a powerful speech on advocacy for the teaching profession.

professional development opportunities that guide us, support us and ultimately make us better co-workers and professionals."

Guest speakers highlighted the importance of investing in North Dakota's students, educators and public schools, with presentations on universal school meals, higher education, retirement security and educator leadership.

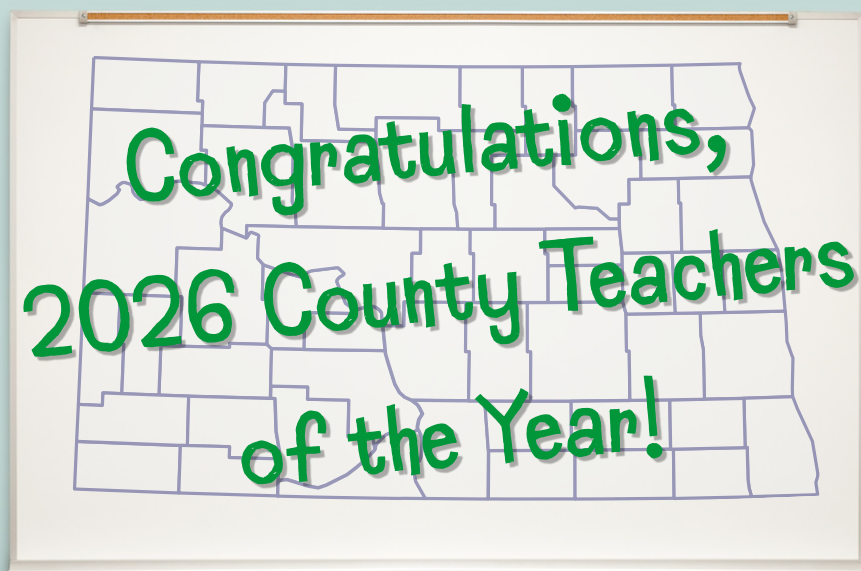
2026 North Dakota Teacher of the Year Frannie Tunseth encouraged delegates to embrace their important roles in discussions on the future of public education and services.

"We are not waiting for permission to be included," she said. "We are not waiting for a place to be set for us. We are the table. We are the collective

voice that determines whether this profession is sustainable."

Delegates also approved three new business items supporting the universal school meals ballot measure and opposing the June single-subject constitutional measure and the proposed 60% threshold for constitutional amendments on the November ballot, along with the 2026-27 budget and 2027 legislative agenda.

As delegates adjourned, they left with more than adopted budgets and resolutions. They left with a roadmap for the coming year—one focused on growing the union, advocating for public education and public employees, and strengthening our partnerships across North Dakota.



**Congratulations,
2026 County Teachers
of the Year!**

35 NDU members recognized

Thirty-five North Dakota United members are among the 50 educators recently named North Dakota County Teachers of the Year by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. The annual recognition honors outstanding educators who demonstrate excellence in teaching, leadership, and service to their students, schools and communities.

County Teachers of the Year now become eligible for consideration as the 2027 North Dakota Teacher of the Year, with the state honoree to be announced later this year.

“Our members inspire students every day through their expertise, compassion and commitment to public education,” NDU President Nick Archuleta said. “We

congratulate each of these outstanding educators on this well-deserved recognition and thank them for the difference they make in the lives of North Dakota students and their communities.”

The following North Dakota United members were recognized as their county’s 2026 Teacher of the Year:

Adams:	Jennifer Fordahl, Hettinger Public School
Barnes:	Nicole Powers, Jefferson Elementary (Valley City)
Benson:	JoLynn Hill, Maddock Public School
Bottineau:	Chelsea Blada, Westhope Public School
Bowman:	Tyneal Burke, Bowman County Public School
Burke:	Jennifer Nelson, Bowbells Public School
Burleigh:	Amber Pasillas, Grimsrud Elementary (Bismarck)
Cass:	James Urlacher, Discovery Middle School (Fargo)
Cavalier:	Emily Braunberger, Langdon Area Schools
Dunn:	Holly Schmidt, Killdeer Public School
Emmons:	Diana Christensen, HMB Public School
Golden Valley:	Mary Zachmann, Lincoln Elementary (Beach)
Grant:	Kyla Zenker, Roosevelt Public School (Carson)
LaMoure:	Shelby Beethe, Edgeley Public School
Logan:	Brian Schneider, Napoleon Public School
McIntosh:	Wendy Bichler, Ashley Public School
McKenzie:	Else-Marie Westman, Watford City Middle School
McLean:	Dustin Moe, Washburn Public School
Morton:	John Gieser, Mandan High School
Mountrail:	Marisa Bueno, Parshall Public School
Nelson:	Benjamin Scallon, Lakota High School
Oliver:	Shanna Meier, Center-Stanton Public School
Pembina:	Jeffrey Moe, North Border School District
Ransom:	Kevin Bratland, Enderlin Area Schools
Renville:	Kaylee Olafson, Glenburn Public School
Richland:	Addie Overland, Richland School District
Sargent:	Benjamin Ponzer, Sargent Central Public School
Sioux:	Ian Fisher, Solen Public School
Stark:	Jennifer Nokes, Roosevelt Elementary (Dickinson)
Stutsman:	Teresa Olson, James Valley CTC
Towner:	Andria Juarez, North Star Public School
Trail:	Jessica Ogburn, May-Port CG High School
Ward:	Lynn Whitesell, Central Middle School (Minot)
Wells:	Brooke Heil, Harvey Elementary-BM Hanson
Williams:	Lexie Brunsvold, Trenton Public School

Day of Learning Event Held at Capitol



On a cloudy day in April, members of the North Dakota State Teachers of the Year (NDSTOY) chapter gathered at the North Dakota state Capitol to share their knowledge, strengthen connections, and celebrate their passion for education. The North Dakota United Foundation was honored to once again sponsor the event, which was held April 13 in Bismarck.

Since its launch in 2023, the annual Professional Day of Learning has provided NDSTOY members with opportunities to:

- Highlight experiences and expertise that can strengthen teaching and learning across North Dakota
- Connect and collaborate with fellow educators
- Explore ways the NDSTOY Chapter can bring its vision and mission to life by sharing ideas and best practices with colleagues statewide.

The agenda was intentionally designed to encourage educators to learn with and from one another. Sessions focused on topics including AI in the classroom, integrating the science of reading with personalized

instruction, collective efficacy and collaborative teams, and cultural similarities and differences from a Filipino teacher's perspective. Participants were also joined throughout the day by ND University System Commissioner Brent Sanford, ND United President Nick Archuleta, Erin Oban from North Dakotans for Public Schools and NDU press secretary Joel Crane.

The impact of the Professional Day of Learning will continue to resonate in classrooms across North Dakota for years to come. Educators are encouraged to stay connected and continue sharing resources, ideas, inspiration, and challenges as they bring their learning back to colleagues and communities throughout the state.

The NDU Foundation extends its gratitude to the event sponsors: Bobcat, Brady Martz, Essentia Health, Missouri Slope Central Labor Council, Bravera, Aspire Credit Union, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Horace Mann, Railway Credit Union, Advanced Business Methods, Electric Systems Inc., Capital City Construction Inc., NRG, and Grant County State Bank.

Health Insurance Costs Raise Concern for Members



Health insurance is getting more expensive by the day. As we continue to hear story after story of health insurance costs eating into family budgets and erasing wages, we want to build a plan to fight together for more affordable health insurance for members like you.

We recently took the first step to gather data from all of you about how your health insurance is working, or not working, for you.

Our pollster, DFM Research, conducted the survey online and 557 members completed the survey which gives us a margin of error of plus or minus four percentage points.

Several trends emerged as we looked at the polling results:

- Across the state, premiums are often fully covered by employers for single plans, but the premiums escalate quickly for single plus spouse/dependent and family plans.
- Almost a quarter of members on family plans are paying more than \$1,000 per month for their insurance premium.

- Almost a third of members are enrolled in high-deductible health plans, which shift the financial risk and burden onto employees and often lead to delayed care.
- Affordability of insurance is a concern across the state, but our members in rural communities are feeling the crunch more than ever. Nearly half of members in small towns and rural communities say their health insurance is “unaffordable” or “very unaffordable.”
- 61% of members have had to delay care due to cost concerns.
- 82% of members agree or strongly agree with the following statement: “The raises I have received at work are being limited by the constantly rising costs of health insurance premiums.”

Going forward, we will continue to listen to our members concerns about health insurance and work collectively to build a plan for action for the legislative session of 2027 and contract negotiations for our K-12 teachers in the spring of 2027.



* 2026 SUMMER LEADERSHIP & ADVOCACY SUMMIT



We're excited to announce that the 2026 Summer Leadership & Advocacy Summit is back for its third year, and this year we will be hosting in both Bismarck and West Fargo.

Bismarck

Monday, July 20, and Tuesday, July 21
Horizon Middle School

The 2026 Summer Leadership & Advocacy Summit will cover a range of topics to meet members where they are and provide them with the necessary skills to move to a place of agenda-driving leadership within their local association and beyond. Topics covered will be: Governance & Leadership, Organizing, Advocacy, Strategy & Fiscal Health, Leading the Profession, and more.

To register and learn more about the logistics, [click here](#).

If you any questions, you can email amber.augustadt@ndunited.org.

West Fargo

Thursday, July 23, and Friday, July 24
West Fargo High School



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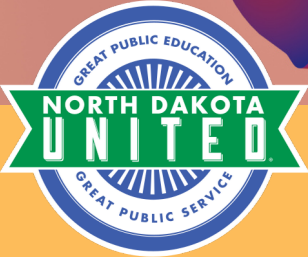
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