

North Dakotans Asked To Grade The State's K-12 Schools

By Mike Moen,
Prairie News Service

North Dakotans wanting to express their views about the state's public schools have a new opportunity to provide feedback. An online survey, from the state superintendent is open for the next few weeks and a major teachers union likes the approach.

The Department of Public Instruction said the survey runs until midnight February 6, with the goal of learning how communities define a quality education for North Dakota students.

Nick Archuleta, president of North Dakota United, the state's largest union for public educators and civil service employees, said it is great to hear what taxpayers and students think, along with educators leading the classrooms.

"Teachers are pretty tough graders about the schools," Archuleta observed. "They're passionate about the opportunities that they can provide to make sure kids have well-rounded educations."

As for voters, the union's own annual surveys indicate the public

likes the work teachers are doing but Archuleta stressed the more data, the better. The new feedback option comes a couple of months after State Superintendent Levi Bachmeier took office. Archuleta would like to see public input gathered each year, while crediting Bachmeier for visiting school districts during his early weeks on the job.

Archuleta expects the ongoing educator shortage and its ripple effect to be reflected in survey results, adding there are other emerging forces within public education which are not going away.

"What does the future of education look like regarding the utilization of AI?" Archuleta asked. "Education is continuously evolving, and how do we harness AI for all the good things that it can do?"

He emphasized it should be balanced with protecting the learning environment from the negative effects associated with artificial intelligence. Like other states, North Dakota has seen certain student test scores rebound after a pandemic-related slide. However, reading scores are still lagging.

Dakota Gardener: Crocus, The Plant Of The Year

By Kelsey Deckert,
Horticulturist NDSU Extension

The Lunar New Year starts on February 17, and this coming year is the year of the fire horse. The horse represents energy, independence and adventure. The element of fire represents passion and intensity. Sounds like 2026 could be a fast-paced journey!

For the past few years, I have started my New Year's Dakota Gardener column off with National Garden Bureau's Plant of the Year. This year, one of the Plants of the Year is the crocus. The crocus symbolizes fresh beginnings, joy, hope and rebirth in many cultures. For many, crocuses are the first sign of spring, bringing joy for the change of seasons! Don't confuse it with the prairie crocus, which is commonly found in pastures and hilltops in early spring.

Crocus is a genus of the iris family and is hardy in zones 3-8. They are one of the first flowering plants in the spring, and they even push through snow. There are many varieties of crocus that can be added to the garden if you enjoy varying hues of purple and yellow. You can even find different varieties of white crocuses.

Growing crocuses is quite simple. Choose a site that receives several hours of direct sunlight. Plant crocus bulbs in the fall, about six to eight weeks before the first frost. This will give the plants enough time to establish roots before winter sets in. You will want to plant them 3-4 inches deep with the pointed tip facing upward. Make sure to space each bulb 3-4 inches apart. Water thoroughly once planted, and after that, they don't require much care unless an extended drought occurs.

Crocuses generally are resistant to pests, but occasionally, a rodent may dig up the bulb. Considering in an undisturbed area, as the crocuses will self-seed and gradually spread to create beautiful clusters of color every year.

Being a horse owner myself, I must say that I believe that crocus is an excellent choice for Plant of the Year! Just like horses, crocuses offer natural beauty, and they are resilient and dependable.

For more information about crocuses, contact your local NDSU Extension agent. Find the Extension office for your county at www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/extension/extension-county-offices.

Virtual Soil Compaction Conference To Be Held Throughout February

Soil compaction is a growing concern for farmers and land managers, especially across the northern U.S. and southern Canada.

North Dakota State University; University of Minnesota Extension; Manitoba Agriculture; Iowa State University; and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness will host the Northern Soil Compaction Conference, an international virtual event designed to help producers understand, manage and prevent compaction.

The conference will be held online from 9 a.m. to noon CST on February 3, 10, 17 and 24.

Compaction can restrict root and crop growth, reduce water infiltration, limit nutrient access, increase crop disease pressure and lower overall yields. Every pass of heavy equipment increases the risk of soil compaction.

"There are effective strategies to fix existing compaction issues and prevent them in the future," says Carlos Pires, NDSU Extension soil health specialist. "These strategies include using cover crops, rotating

crops, adjusting tillage practices, managing traffic patterns, properly inflating tires and distributing axle loads more evenly."

The 2026 Northern Soil Compaction Conference will provide an opportunity to explore the latest research and practical solutions from top experts in the U.S. and Canada. Attendees can gain actionable insights to address current compaction issues, develop long-term management strategies and learn about the benefits of these practices for productivity and profitability.

There is a registration fee for the full four day event. A limited number of scholarships are available. Recorded presentations will be available for registrants who are unable to attend a session.

For more information and to register, visit ndsu.ag/NSCC2026.

Certified crop advisers may earn up to twelve continuing education units (CEUs) over the four days of the conference.

For more information, contact Pires at carlos.pires@ndsu.edu.

Dakota Datebook: A Capitol Trolley

By Sarah Walker

Anyone passing through Bismarck today is able to go to the 17th floor of the capitol building, the observation deck, and view the landscape of the city from above. Tiny people, cars, trees, and buildings can be seen in every direction. There weren't seventeen floors in the original Capitol, but at the time it was built, there was much less to look at. The building was quite some distance north of the developing city.

A Capitol "bus," drawn by horse, carted visitors and officials back and forth across this divide. In 1905, a trolley car was put into service, originally to haul coal up the hill to the Capitol, but the car also hauled people and was faster than the horse-drawn bus.

January of 1907 wasn't necessarily one of the most memorable winters, though The Ward County Independent reported that one man from Ryder, Peter Ramstad, rode 45 miles "with a fierce northeaster staring him in the face." He reported the worst ride he ever experienced in his twenty years living there.

However, January 23rd, news of the winter and one of its storms was spreading. As the Grand Forks Evening Times reported: "The disadvantages of having the Capitol located so far from the residence portion of the city was doubly apparent ... when the blizzard which was raging over this portion of the state put the street car line out of commission and made it next to impossible to reach the building."

Drifting snow had forced the streetcar into suspension early on in the day, a hardship for the legislators attending the session. But those who had business at the Capitol still found a way, as carriages and bobsleds were "called into requisition," but the round trip cost \$1 as opposed to ten cents on the streetcar.

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"Radon test kits are simple to use and come with easy-to-understand directions," says Otto. Environmental Quality is giving away a limited number of free radon test kits to ND residents. If you would like to receive a free radon test kit in the

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unanimously agreed to recommend that the salary increases for COLA be effective January 4, 2026, for the 2-week pay period beginning 12/21/2025 and ending 1/3/2026 for 40-hour per week full-time employees that are paid on a bi-weekly basis.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by Taylor, to approve that salary increases for COLA for the 2026 budget year begin on 12/21/2025 for 40-hour per week full-time employees that are paid on a bi-weekly basis as recommended by the Employment Committee. ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

Chair Hysjulien mentioned the Public Works Committee will be meeting soon to work on a policy pertaining to merit increases. Once the Committee completes a policy for merit increases, it will be presented to Council.

EXEMPT/NON-EXEMPT POSITIONS

Chair Hysjulien discussed the mandatory 13.77% employer contribution for law enforcement. This increase from 13.26% to 13.77% becomes effective 1/1/2026. The Employment Committee unanimously agreed to recommend the .51% increase be approved for all City employees that participate in retirement plans through the ND Public Employees Retirement System.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by Weyrauch, to approve paying 13.77% for all employees that participate in retirement plans through the ND Public Employees Retirement System effective 1/1/2026 as recommended by the Employment Committee. ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

YEAR-END RETENTION BONUSES

Chair Hysjulien stated the Employment Committee unanimously agreed to recommend a retention bonus of \$300 for all regular full-time employees and \$150 for regular part-time employees to be paid in January 2026. The bonus would include 13 full-time employees and 1 part-time employee for a total of \$4,050.00. The bonuses exclude the library staff as the Library Board approves their bonuses.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by LeRoh, to approve a retention bonus of \$300 regular full-time employees and \$150 for regular part-time employees to be paid in January 2026 as recommended by the Employment Committee. ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

PT ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Chairman Hysjulien commented on the part-time administrative assistant job opening that closed on December 26, 2025. Chairman Hysjulien stated there was one applicant for the position and she met the qualifications for the position. The Employment Committee unanimously agreed to recommend the hiring of Joan Hollekim at \$36.50 per hour effective 1/1/2026. The position would be under 20 hours per week and does not qualify for benefits except for the legally mandated benefits.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by Hysjulien, to approve the recommendation of the Employment Committee to offer the part-time administrative assistant position to Joan Hollekim at \$36.50 per hour effective 1/1/2026. ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

2026 SALARY SCHEDULE

Chairman Hysjulien presented the 2026 salaries, which were reviewed by the Employment Committee and included in the 2026 City Budget. The salaries reflect a 2.5% COLA for all regular full-time and part-time employees except for the new salary set for the Chief of Police for the year 2026 and the library staff whose salaries are recommended by the Library Board and approved by the City Council.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by LeRoh, to approve 2026 salaries as follows:

Gene Leroohl \$34.07/hr (\$70,865.60/yr);

Chris Jenkins \$38.77/hr (\$80,641.60/yr);

Ada Arneson \$42.31/hr (\$88,004.80/yr);

Bryan Davies \$30.68/hr (\$63,814.40/yr);

Amanda Dennis \$47.88/hr (\$99,590.40/yr);

Marquel Sauber \$27.46/hr (\$57,116.80/yr);

Briana Dazell \$32.87/hr (\$86,369.60/yr);

Sam Pesik \$45.68/hr (\$95,014.40/yr);

David Brown \$45.46/hr (\$94,556.80/yr);

Joseph Rivers \$32.07/hr (\$66,705.60/yr);

Jeanette Ranum \$26.90/hr (\$55,952.00/yr);

Joel Ngoromo \$26.90/hr (\$55,952.00/yr);

Ronica Pederson \$32.29/hr (\$67,163.20/yr);

Reimbursement \$84.00

21641 Kemp Construction, Repaired Curb Stop at 511 1st St NW \$1,610.00

21643 Stanley Fire Department, Reimbursement for Supplies \$19,537.20

21644 Stanley Public School District, Reimburse for 50% Cost St Repair on S Main \$29,796.50

ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by Weyrauch, to adjourn at 4:43 P.M. All present voted yes. Motion carried.

Accepted, 2026.

Marlin Ranum, Mayor Stanley City Council

ATTEST: Ada Arneson Stanley City Auditor

January Is National Radon Action Month

During National Radon Action Month, the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality reminds residents that cold weather months are a great time to test their homes for radon, a leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.

Radon-related illness claims more than 21,000 lives in the United States annually. In North Dakota, 63 percent of homes have an elevated radon level above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Action Level of 4.0 picocuries per liter (pCi/L). The EPA lists North Dakota as Zone 1, meaning it has the highest potential for elevated radon levels. Because of this, the EPA and Environmental Quality encourage North Dakotans to test their homes for radon and address any elevated levels.

"The good news is radon mitigation systems can manage high radon levels," said Otto. By installing a mitigation system, homeowners can effectively lower the level of radon in their homes. These systems use many conventional building materials and require few specialized tools to install. These systems may be installed by a homeowner or a radon mitigation contractor. Once in place, a properly installed system will reduce radon gas and safely vent it to the outside.

Visit deq.nd.gov/wm/radon for a list of radon mitigation contractors, information on how to test for radon, what radon results mean, and how to address elevated radon levels.

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Source: Code Section 50-10.1

CLOSEOUTS

The Council reviewed financial information for sewer, water and street projects. City Assistant Hollekim mentioned a little over \$8 million was transferred this year to cover project costs and a little over \$1 million is anticipated in 2026 transfers to cover the remaining costs of projects completed or in progress.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by Weyrauch, to approve funding the Capital Improvement Phase 2 Project for Water & Sewer District #56 at 75% City share using money from the oil and gas gross production taxes and sales tax revenue and 25% owner share with an interest rate of 3.5% for special assessments. ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

Chairman Hysjulien mentioned the Public Works Committee will be meeting soon to work on a policy pertaining to merit increases. Once the Committee completes a policy for merit increases, it will be presented to Council.

EXEMPT/NON-EXEMPT POSITIONS

Chairman Hysjulien stated the Employment Committee discussed in great length classifying all exempt positions as non-exempt. Chairman Hysjulien stated the Employment Committee unanimously agreed to recommend that all exempt positions be classified as non-exempt effective the new pay period beginning January 4, 2026. There was discussion that if Council approves the recommendation, it should be noted that the Council recognizes that there are department officials that can be classified as exempt and if the Council classifies an exempt employee as a non-exempt employee that it is subject to change. Chairman Hysjulien stated there is currently lots of overtime being paid and overtime needs to be managed through the department heads and through City Council. Further, there may be budget restraints where it may be necessary to reclassify employees that meet exempt status.

Motion made by Littlecreek, seconded by Weyrauch, to approve the recommendation of the Employment Committee to reclassify all City positions designated as exempt to non-exempt status effective at the start of the new pay period on January 4, 2026. The motion also specifies that the City maintains the right to return any of these reclassified positions back to exempt status at a future date, should the Council deem it necessary. ON ROLL CALL VOTE, the following Council Members voted "AYE": LeRoh, Weyrauch, Taylor, Jarm, Littlecreek and Hysjulien; and no "NAYS". Motion carried.

YEAR-END TRANSFERS

Motion made by Hysjulien, seconded by Littlecreek, to approve funding the Multi-Community Chip Seal Improvement District #