

To: Dickinson Public School Board Members

From: Kris Fehr, Board Member

Date: 11/11/2014

RE: Report on North Dakota School Boards Assn. Convention October 23-24, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to attend the North Dakota School Boards Association conference. There were 663 total people in attendance and 243 delegates present for the business meeting and delegate assembly. It was an informative conference with a variety of educational opportunities presented in a new 1 ½ day format. Below are summaries of the sessions I attended:

The conference opened Thursday afternoon with keynote Speaker **Juli Burney**, speaking on “Leading with Levity.” She said that using humor when you run into crabbiness is an opportunity to stop crabbiness. Humor helps to relieve stress. She told us not to take on someone’s crabbiness. Most likely the person is upset and angry about something they have no control over. When confronted with negativity we have the ability to choose how we respond. Use humor to depersonalize challenges. Challenges are an opportunity to use good humor and a chance to educate. When someone is upset: 1- what’s the real reason, 2-they are not open to more information or problem solving, and 3-no matter your position in life you have an affect on other people.

The conference’s second keynote speaker, **Dr. Jack Levin of Northwestern University**, talked about his research into homicide and various communities’ responses that were effective in lowering the rates of murder in the communities. He said the murder rate in the United States is still declining (since the 1990s) even though the federal and state governments are spending less on crime fighting due to budget cuts, wars and complacency. The murder rate is declining because the population is aging, violent criminals have been incarcerated since the 1990s crack down on drugs and violence, community policing (police are like social workers), and precedence: we remember the bad old days. Although gang activity is about the same as the 1990s, gangs have changed since the 1950s & 1960s: there’s a huge increase in numbers, from 30,000 to 800,000 members; they are much more dangerous (using guns & knives); more likely to carry guns; and there’s immigrant gangs. Gangs filled the vacuum when adults quit supervising: huge divorce rate, single working parents, dual career families, poverty (kids left to fend for themselves). Juvenile crime (and pregnancy rate) peaks from 3-7 p.m. (after school, before parents come home from work). Levin said the most effective juvenile crime fighting/prevention we have is after school programs, although many schools have requirements that the kids who need it the most can’t qualify (barriers: minimum GPA, good conduct, fee payment, transportation home). He also talked about school rampage shootings in small towns and rural areas. The motive is revenge for the following reasons:

- Chronic frustration/depression from bullying, humiliation or being ignored by peers over a long period of time and/or living with severe family conflict or deprivation.
- Externalization of blame (murder by proxy).
- Isolation from conventional influences.
- Catastrophic loss – leads killer to plan – can be rejection by a girlfriend, humiliation episode or bullying, academic failure (mostly college students).
- Access to and training in use of firearms.

He said the role of a school resource officer is to help students feel more secure, limit the body counts, deal with everyday episodes of crime and truancy, limit the culture of silence that tells kids not to inform (many rampage shootings have been averted because a kid told someone), and educate students about the evils of bullying (most important role). Typical rampage shooters:

- High school or middle school,
- Single killer who’s already on campus,
- Killer makes revealing remarks that aren’t reported,
- Chronically bullied or humiliated, as well as family conflict,
- Suffers a catastrophic loss, and
- Has weapon(s) from their home.

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Levin says that while schools can't do everything, school hours continue to be the safest hours of the day for kids. Putting school violence in perspective: a person is more likely to contract malaria, leprosy, ebola, or be in a car accident than to be killed by a shooter at school.

**A Leader of Leaders: Serving as the Chairperson of Your Local School Board**, with Ed Massey of Kentucky and past National School Boards Assn president. Massey gave a history of school boards: a liaison between the school and community, true democracy & the ultimate form of local government, and a complex job that most people don't understand. The most important role of the school board is to advocate for public education. This involves communicating the changes in education and the law that have happened over many years. He said that it's imperative that board members engage in continuing professional development to become a better board member. School boards also must adapt to changing times and one area is Common Core. He said that Common Core is a place to start. For example, one of his school board's goals is for each student to have an ACT score of 24; the goal is not the Common Core. He said that one school district adopted multi-track, year round schooling because they couldn't build school buildings fast enough.

The **Drug Awareness** session was conducted by an assistant state's attorney and a BCI special agent. The presentation focused on identifying the six most frequently used controlled substances in North Dakota and their side effects.

**Navigating the Employee Discipline Tightrope** was presented by Lisa Kudelka, the human resources manager for Bismarck Public Schools. She says that when she's confronted by employee conduct that needs some discipline, she asks herself these questions: What's her philosophy, what's best for kids, and are we getting a good return on our taxpayer's money? She reminded the group that people are responsible for their behavior at work. Use their job description as a basis, talk about their strengths and compare to the job description, be very clear how they aren't meeting expectations, ask what has happened, make an action plan of what they want to change, create a timeline. Do evaluations with all employees. Make sure to have documentation.

In the **Leadership Track for Board Officers: Informal discussion with Ed Massey and Glenn Koocher**, the discussion began with using board meetings as a chance to show the community what the school district is doing for educating kids. Koocher is the executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees. The board needs to lead by example by being professional, following an agenda and policies, managing its meetings. They presented information about using social media: don't address school issues on social media. Facebook rants: they are baiting you to respond. Personal agendas should be taken care of in private. Reinforce the chain of command: the board is the last in the chain. Superintendent evaluation: the board chair leads the discussion, tie performance and evaluation to policy. The board holds the superintendent responsible and the board needs to be professional when addressing the superintendent evaluation. Remember to use common sense. Board retreat: this is a team approach to resolving significant issues. Use diagnostic tools to identify the issues.

I also attended the **Policy Services Breakfast**, with Alyssa Martin, Annette Bendish and Patty VerDouw, new policy services assistant. Sample wording for motions on policies were handed out. Several policies need to be updated now, according to the U.S. Office of Civil Rights (see "Policy Ponderings"): AAC & AAC-BR (Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment), BCBA (Public Participation at Board Meetings), DDA (sick leave), FDD (Pregnant and Parenting Students), and KACB (Complaints about Personnel). There were 34 policy-related documents updated in 2014. Other information: minutes need to show how each person voted. If it was unanimous, the minutes need to state that the vote was unanimous. There

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were some wording reminders: not Board of Education, it is School Board. Only Fargo is the “Board of Education.” (see NDCC 15.1-09-05). Do not use “the District” when assigning or delegating specific responsibilities because it’s too broad. Avoid placing law in policy. Avoid placing belief and value statements in policy. Use minutes to explain why a policy is being adopted. There is a *new policy website*. Access by visiting [www.ndsba.org](http://www.ndsba.org) and clicking on “policy services” or <http://policy.ndsba.org>. Use your existing user name and password. You can review and compare existing policy to recommended changes and download drafts to see all the changes. It is supposed to be helpful to school districts as they revise and adopt policies.

**Delegate Assembly:** The new resolutions presented for adoption passed. Jamestown School District presented the NDCEL’s revision to the TFFR resolution (Tanya Rude seconded the motion) and the discussion mainly centered on the difference between a defined contribution and a defined benefit plan. Most speakers were against recommending such a radical change and seemed to favor a study with the committee that is currently studying the issue. The following officers and directors were elected:

President: Jim Rostad, Minot

Vice President: Ben Auch, Mott-Regent

Past President: Greg Allen, Jamestown

NW Director: Mike Lautenschlager, Lewis & Clark, Berthold

SW Director: Lawrence King, Bismarck

SE Director: Jim Johnson, Fargo

NE Director: Jennifer Johnson, Larimore (was not up for election and continues on the board)