

NDSBA Convention Report
Sarah Ricks

I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to attend the NDSBA convention. I felt the time spent there was worthwhile that I learned a great deal.

Thursday, October 23rd

I attended the New Member Seminar from 8 am until 2:45 pm.

Topics covered included school finance, conflict of interest, school board roles and responsibilities, open records and meetings, board ethics, policy and a Q&A with experienced board members.

I found the school finance portion to be very helpful in coming to fully understand where our funding comes from and how it is calculated. It helped me better understand some of the financial issues we face as a district.

Much of the material covered in conflict of interest, roles and responsibilities, open meetings and board ethics had already been well explained to me, but a few specifics were clarified and we went through some interesting thought exercises that helped all of us to realize that sometimes boards are faced with tough decisions that may not always have a clear, correct answer.

I found the policy services section interesting. It was nice to get a better feel for where the policy comes from and why and also that there is some logic and order to the letter labeling system used for policy.

The board member panel was encouraging. All of them felt that their time serving on school boards had been well worth it.

At 3:00 I attended the opening session with Ms. Rude and Ms. Fehr. Juli Burney delivered a delightful and inspiring presentation called *Leading with Levity*. It was a good reminder to keep things in perspective and that having a sense of humor can change an unpleasant situation.

I also attended the first business session with my colleagues during which we were introduced to the NDSBA candidates, given an overview of resolutions on the agenda for tomorrow and got to hear the NDSBAs take on some resolutions that will be on the state November ballot.

Friday, October 24th

8:00 The General Session was a presentation by Dr. Jack Levin on Preventing Juvenile Violence and School Rampage Shootings. I found the information fascinating and remarkably comforting. Some of the take away points were that violent crime among teenagers decreases when cities provide adult supervision, activities and jobs for teenagers after school and in the summer times. He does not recommend zero tolerance policies because they remove good judgement from the picture. A suspended student has more time on his hands, thus a greater potential for criminal activity. After school programs should be for everyone without limitations of minimum GPA, conduct, fees or transportation. The bad news for us is that while violent crime takes place in primarily large cities, rampage shootings tend to happen in suburbs and rural areas.

Students who commit these kinds of crime usually have the characteristics of chronic frustration/depression, lack of good friends, catastrophic loss, and access and training in the use of firearms.

School Resource Officers can be a valuable resource in dealing with truancy, stopping bullying and stopping the culture of silence (i.e. encourage students to report suspicious behavior).

To prevent shootings we must stop excessive and positive media coverage of school shooters, have an effective anti-bullying program in place and communicate with troubled students before they cause trouble. The good news is that school hours are still the safest for children and rampage shootings are

still very rare.

9:15 I attended the Positive Impact of Career and Technical Education session. The presenter provided a lot of great data indicating the value of CTE classes in our schools. He was also hopeful about lobbying for increased funding for CTE program at the state level. CTE students have significant increases in average testing scores and graduation rates when compared to the total secondary student population. Not all students need college, in fact jobs available in North Dakota would not support 100% of students having a college degree. However, most jobs do require training in the appropriate field, a pathway that CTE can help students start on.

10:30 Standards for College and Career Readiness (ND State Standards)

This session was very informative about exactly how the ND State Standards relate to the common core, how the standards are arrived at, how often they are reviewed and what, exactly, as a state we are committed as far as Common Core, Smarter Balanced and the Federal Government are concerned.

Messages that we can share with those concerned about common core included:

- Standards are the WHAT and curriculum is the HOW, we do not have to purchase “common core” text books

- ND adopted common core standards as the state standards in 2010 because the standards were more rigorous than the previous ND standards. Some of the standards were modified slightly to better fit ND and the standards are not the “be all, end all” because by law, standards will be reviewed and modified if necessary every 5-7 years.

- State law requires us to assess children and report to the state.

- If we want Title I and II funds as well as free and reduced lunch funds from the federal government we must also provide assessment data to the fed, however the data is aggregate student data no individual student data.

- If you have a problem with federal government involvement, please take your fight to the problem (i.e. No Child Left Behind laws) NOT to the teachers trying to do their jobs.

- We can withdraw from the Smarterbalanced consortia at any time if it ceases to meet our needs.

- We have not agreed to any unpublished common core standards.

11:30 I was pleased to listen to our State Supreme Court Chief Justice, Gerald VandeWalle in a conversation about Kids, Courts and Schools.

He suggested that we need to get more creative about school discipline. If a child skips school we suspend him, suspensions increase the rate of dropping out, the rate of arrest and the likelihood of incarceration. He suggests that we take a careful look at the potentially harmful effects of zero tolerance discipline, criminalization of normative adolescent behavior, the involvement of police in schools and high-stakes testing.

As a whole, he recommends that communities take a look at the underlying causes of misbehavior such as trauma, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, family difficulties, etc.

These students may require more financial and human resources than an average student however it is more cost-effective overall to keep a child in school than to keep them on the public dole or in prison as an adult. We desperately need more treatment options for students with mental health issues and addictions.

After the lunch break I attended the Conversation with State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler at 1:15.

Ms. Baesler fielded several questions that tended to be unique to the asker's situation. There was a lot of discussion about open enrollment between districts and student number issues, etc. Her main take-home message however was that education is changing and we need to embrace that. We cannot expect education to look the same as it did for us. 40% of ND students require remedial college courses. We

need to increase access to AP courses. Knowing is not enough anymore, students must be able to apply what they know. Are we preparing our students for jobs that require a career training certificate or college degree?

In a conversation after the official session we talked about the possibility of requesting NCEL to get a High School GPA comparison from across the state to see if we are putting our students on a level playing field when it comes to college admissions.

2:15 Introduction to the Online ND State Assessment System

The presentation detailed the rolling out of the new state assessment system, what subjects would be available when. The differences between adaptive testing and standard testing were explained. There are many strengths to this kind of testing including avoiding test fatigue and getting more accurate and individualized results. The system is also inherently capable of delivering accommodations to speakers of other languages, those with hearing or visual impairment or with other needs as specified by an IEP or 504 plan.

As a whole, the system seems well thought out, although at this point the test results will take months to come back because of writing samples. The presenter indicated that they are working on a short form test that will deliver instant results to use midyear so that teachers can adjust instruction as needed.

3:15 Second Business Session and Delegate Assembly

Election results were announced and then we were able to vote on the proposed resolutions. We were pleased that the TFFR resolution we were uncomfortable with was amended by the vote of the delegates.

Thank you again for the opportunity to attend, I feel more informed and confident as a school board member.